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THE RAY

BRADBURY

CHRONICLES

3



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THE RAY
BRADBURY
CHRONICLES

VOLUME THREE

A BYRON PREISS BOOK



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THE **RAY**

BRADBURY

CHRONICLES

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INTRODUCTION

PEOPLE ASK HOW I ENJOY seeing my short stories done up as comic books as opposed to film or TV. The answer is I enjoy every form equally, since I am a child of silent and sound films, a collector of comic strips, and, late in life, if not a couch potato, a sort of French-fried watcher of late night TV, both good and bad.

For they are all the same. They may seem somewhat different, but from a collector of metaphors like myself, they are almost identical. Comic strips, theater, films, and TV are all first cousins to haiku and numerous

other poetry forms. If this sounds forced and incredible, consider: poetry is by its very nature, picture-making. It strikes us with images and leaves us with ghost forms like those left on the inner eye when you look away from the sun and see it printed on the nearest house front or wall.

So because of my love of poetry, and especially the short Japanese haiku form, combined with my love of

painters and painting, added to my collections of POPEYE, MICKEY MOUSE, and FLASH GORDON comic strips circa 1932, I have the ability to write stories that when finished can be split in three or four parts. One part going directly into illustration, another into films, a third into TV, and fourth, radio. And

radio, as we all know, is image-making for the eardrums.

So I have had the best of all possible lives in a world filled with pictures. I have collected image-ideas all of my life and kept them around, tucked

in my head, ready to leap forth if I picked up a pen or touched a typewriter. It follows that I dearly love seeing my work cartooned out in a book like this, or thrown on a silver screen, or trapped in boxes in a few million front rooms. I do not differentiate in these delights, I appreciate and love them all.



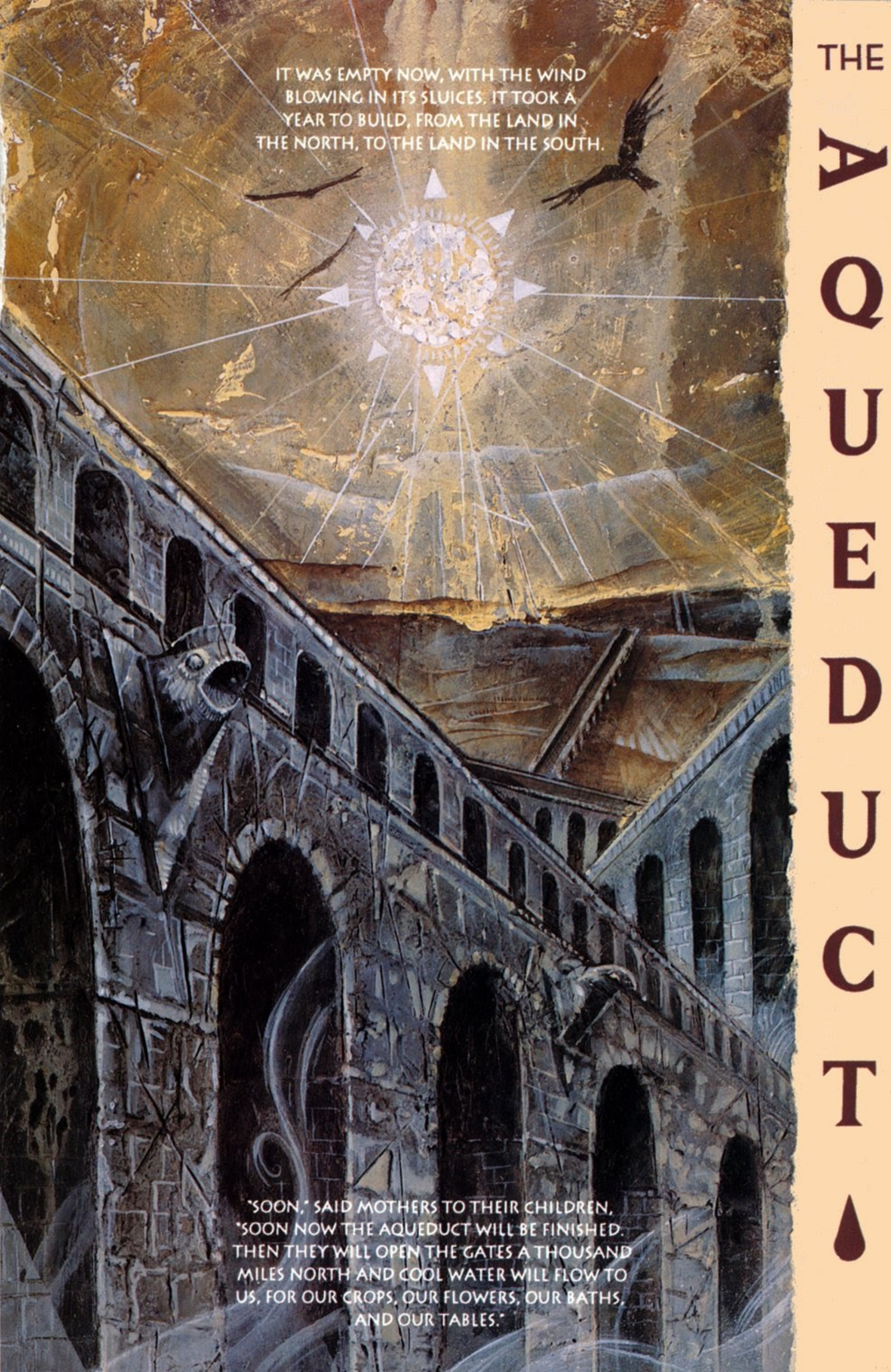
Ron Bradley

THE AQUEDUCT

Adapted by Bruce Jensen

I don't know where this strange story came from. It might well have come from seeing too many bad TV news reports or scanning the worst war headlines in the local papers. That, plus my encountering a number of aqueducts over the years, in Italy and France. I don't for a moment expect that everyone reading the story will like it. The idea itself is so upsetting that even when I read it, I am unnerved. I would hate to have anyone come up to me one day and say, "Mr. Bradbury, are you really like your story THE AQUEDUCT?" I hope that I do not look nor act like this story in any way. It reads much like the stories I wrote when I was in high school and fascinated, rightly or wrongly, with strange dooms and terrible destructions. I am glad to say I do not find myself taken with such disturbing notions in my later years. You have been warned. THE AQUEDUCT might not be your cup of tea, or whatever it is that runs through the story. I make no apologies. I simply urge you to be careful. Proceed.

RAY B.



IT WAS EMPTY NOW, WITH THE WIND
BLOWING IN ITS SLUICES. IT TOOK A
YEAR TO BUILD, FROM THE LAND IN
THE NORTH, TO THE LAND IN THE SOUTH.

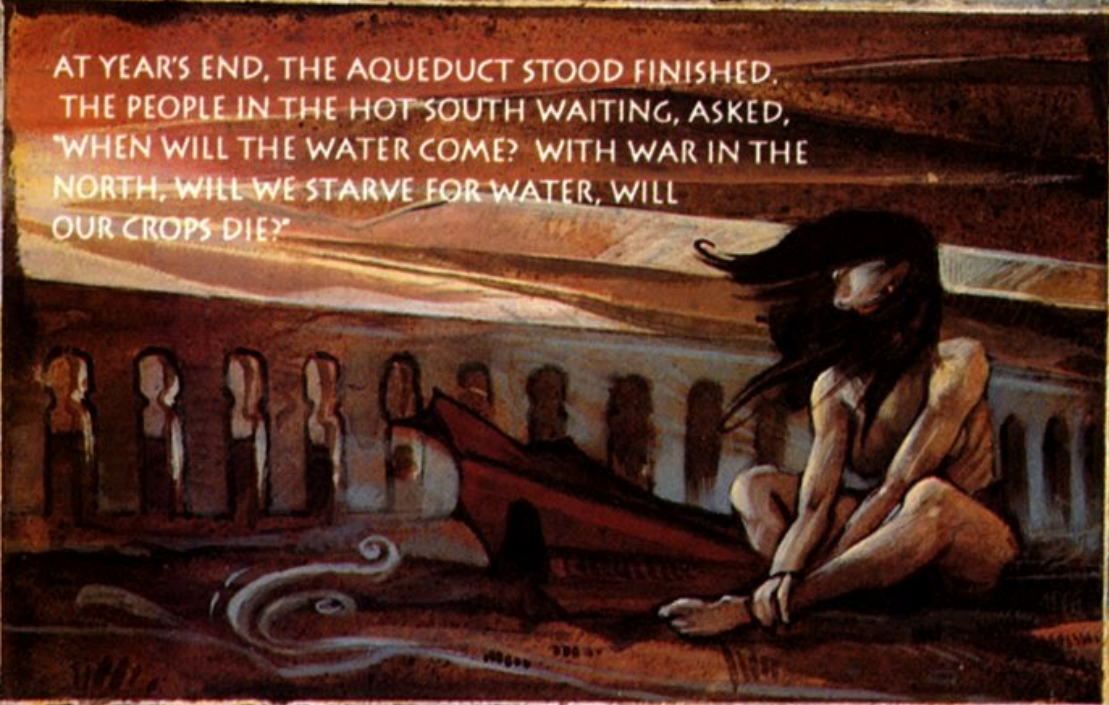
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"SOON," SAID MOTHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN,
"SOON NOW THE AQUEDUCT WILL BE FINISHED.
THEN THEY WILL OPEN THE GATES A THOUSAND
MILES NORTH AND COOL WATER WILL FLOW TO
US, FOR OUR CROPS, OUR FLOWERS, OUR BATHS,
AND OUR TABLES."

IN THE NORTH THERE WAS NOT ONE COUNTRY,
BUT TWO. THEY HAD RATTLED THEIR SABERS
AND CLASHED SHIELDS FOR MANY YEARS. THE
SLAUGHTER WAS UNBELIEVABLE. MORE THAN
ONE HUNDRED MILLION PEOPLE HAD BEEN SLAIN.

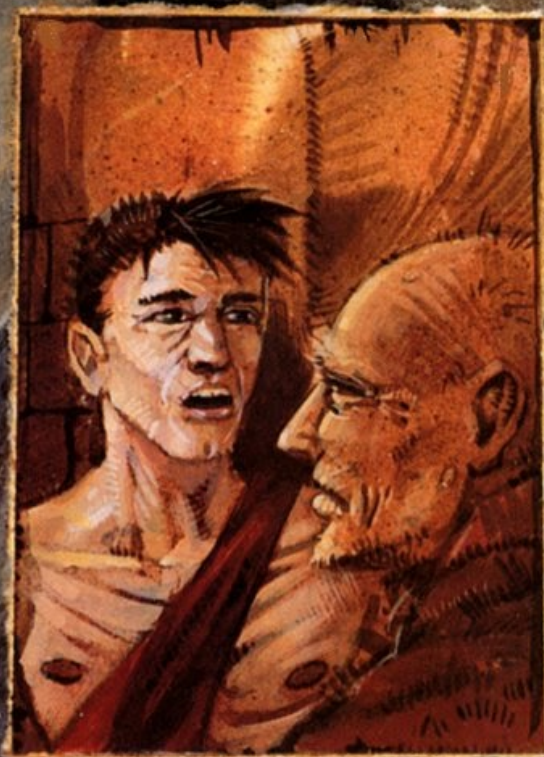


AT YEAR'S END, THE AQUEDUCT STOOD FINISHED.
THE PEOPLE IN THE HOT SOUTH WAITING, ASKED,
"WHEN WILL THE WATER COME? WITH WAR IN THE
NORTH, WILL WE STARVE FOR WATER, WILL
OUR CROPS DIE?"



THE PEOPLE GATHERED BY THE TENS OF
MILLIONS FROM THE BOILING COUNTRYSIDE.
"IT'S COMING!" THE WORD PASSED FROM
PERSON TO PERSON DOWN THE THOUSAND
MILE LENGTH OF THE AQUEDUCT.

AND FROM A GREAT DISTANCE, THERE WAS A
SOUND OF RUSHING AND RUNNING, THE SOUND
THAT LIQUID MAKES IN A STONE CHANNEL.

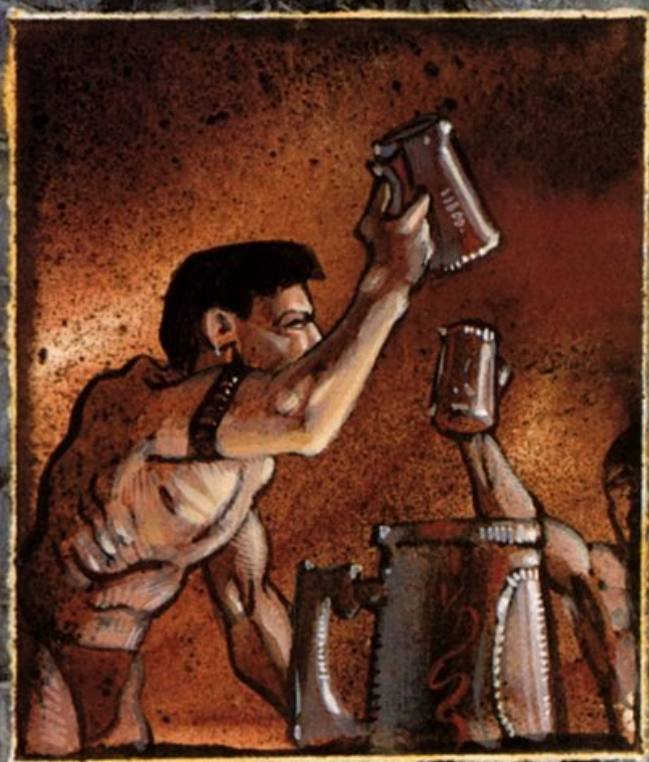


"IT'S HERE! ANY SECOND NOW, LISTEN!" SAID THE PEOPLE.

LIQUID POURED FROM THE SLUICEWAYS DOWN
THE LAND, INTO THE STONE BATHS, INTO THE
GLASSES, INTO THE FIELDS. THERE WAS SINGING
YOU COULD HEAR FROM ONE TOWN TO ANOTHER.




IN THE FIELDS, THE FATHER AND HIS TWO
SONS LAUGHED. "IF THIS KEEPS UP, WE'VE
A GREAT LIFE AHEAD. A FULL SILO AND
A CLEAN BODY."



"DON'T WORRY," SAID THE SONS. "THE
PRESIDENT IS SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE
NORTH TO MAKE SURE THAT THE TWO
COUNTRIES THERE CONTINUE TO FIGHT.
WHO KNOWS? IT MIGHT BE A FIFTY-YEAR
WAR!" THEY SANG AND SMILED.





AND AT NIGHT THEY LAY HAPPILY,
LISTENING TO THE GOOD SOUND
OF THE AQUEDUCT, FULL AND RICH,
LIKE A RIVER, RUNNING THROUGH
THEIR LAND TOWARD THE MORNING.

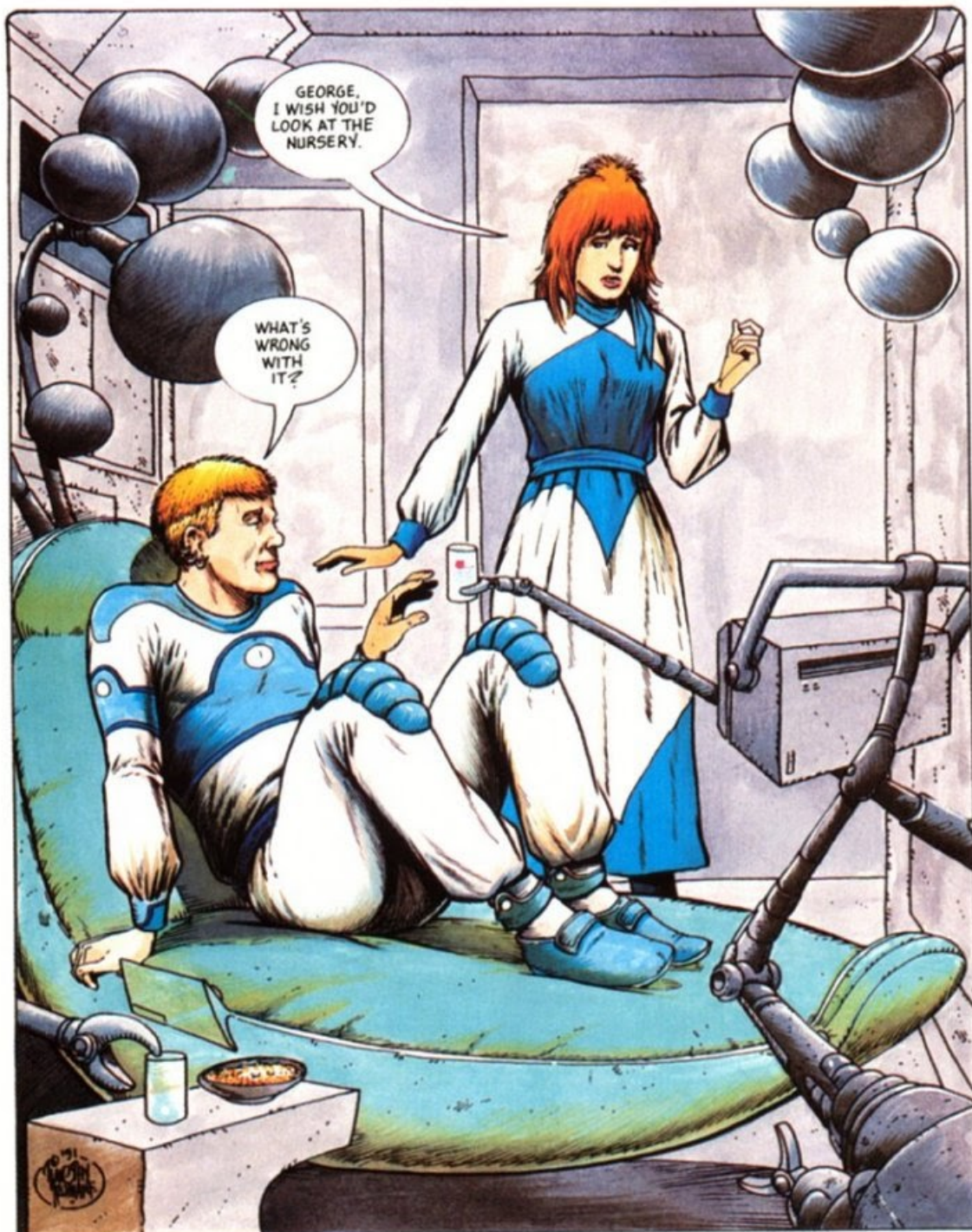
ERICE JENSEN 9

THE VELDT was written as a result of my typing
on a sheet of paper only two words: THE PLAY-
ROOM. I asked myself, what kind of playroom?
In the past. No. In the present. No. In the
future? Yes! What would a future playroom be
like, I wondered, how would it function, what it
cost, and what would be its destiny amongst us?
I brought some characters in, I led them to my
typewriter, introduced them to the Veldt
trapped in the playroom, and let the lions prowl
and roar. All accidental. All started and finished
in two hours. Here it is.

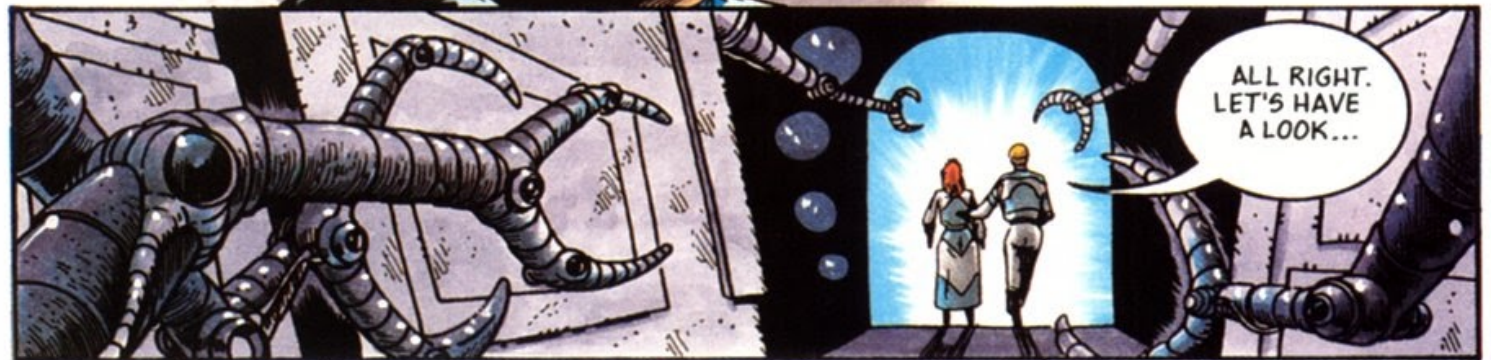
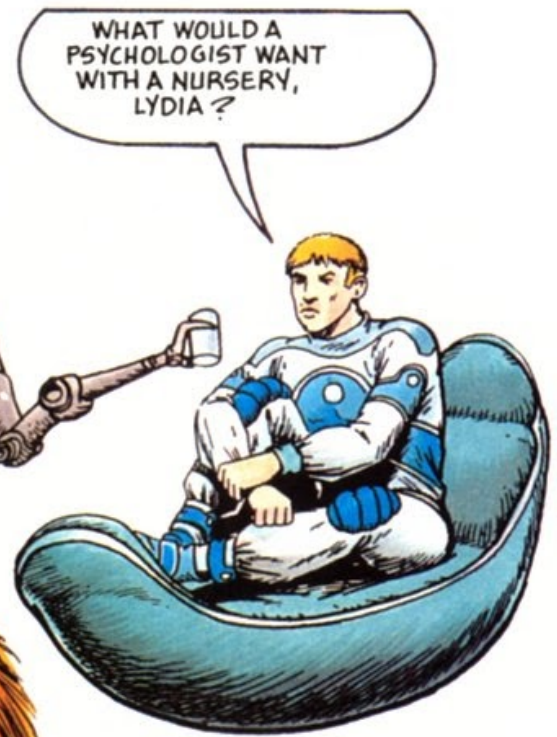
RAY B.

THE VELDT

Adapted by Timothy Truman



THE VELD T





LET'S GET
OUT OF THE
SUN.

THIS IS A LITTLE
TOO REAL. BUT
I DON'T SEE
ANYTHING WRONG.



WAIT A
MOMENT.

YOU'LL
SEE.



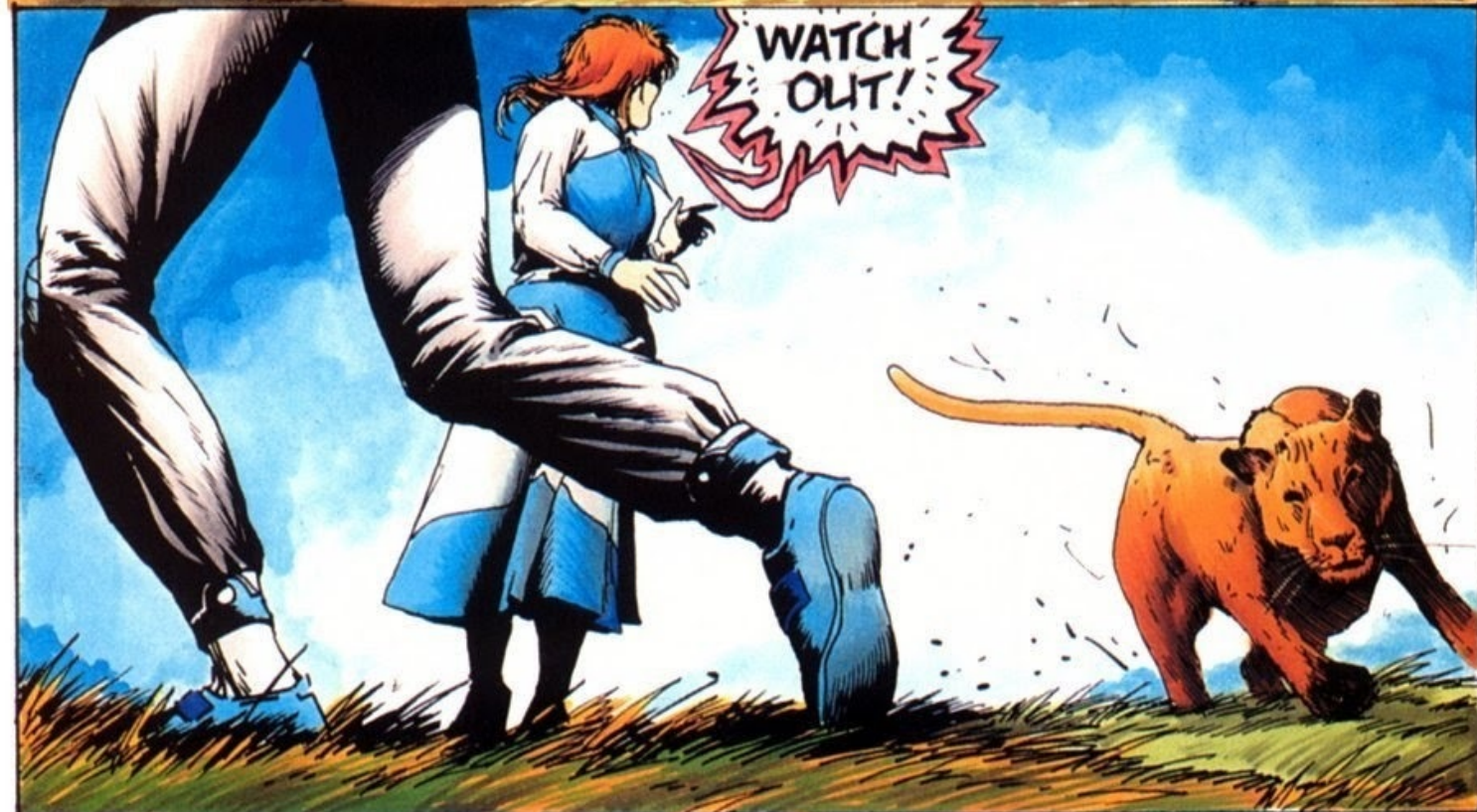
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THE SOUNDS,,, THE THUMP OF DISTANT ANTELOPE FEET ON GRASSY SOD,,, THE PAPERY RUSTLING OF WINGS.



THE SMELLS,,, THE HOT STRAW SMELL OF LION GRASS,,, THE COOL GREEN SMELL OF A HIDDEN WATER HOLE,,, THE RUSTY SMELL OF ANIMALS,,, THE SMELL OF DUST LIKE RED PAPRIKA IN THE HOT AIR.





HOW CAN YOU
LAUGH? THEY
ALMOST GOT US!

WALLS, LYDIA. REMEMBER?
CRYSTAL WALLS, THAT'S ALL
THEY ARE.

THEY **LOOK** REAL -- AFRICA IN YOUR
PARLOR -- BUT IT IS ALL DIMENSIONAL
SUPERACTIONARY. YOU SEND
YOUR THOUGHTS, AND WHAT-
EVER YOU **THINK** WILL APPEAR.

I'M AFRAID.
DID YOU SEE? DID YOU FEEL?
IT'S **TOO** REAL!

YOU'VE GOT TO LOCK THE
NURSERY FOR A FEW DAYS
UNTIL I GET MY NERVES
SETTLED!

NOW, LYDIA. YOU **KNOW** HOW
DIFFICULT PETER IS ABOUT
THAT. WHEN I PUNISHED
HIM A MONTH AGO BY
LOCKING THE NURSERY
EVEN FOR A FEW HOURS --
THE **TANTRUM** HE THREW!
WENDY, TOO. THEY **LIVE**
FOR THE NURSERY.

IT'S GOT TO BE LOCKED.
THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT.

ALL
RIGHT

YOU'VE BEEN
WORKING TOO HARD,
LYDIA. YOU NEED
A REST.

MAYBE I DON'T HAVE
ENOUGH TO DO, GEORGE. WHY
DON'T WE SHUT THE WHOLE
HOUSE OFF FOR A FEW DAYS
AND TAKE A VACATION?

BUT I THOUGHT
THAT'S WHY WE **BOUGHT**
A "HAPPY-LIFE HOME," SO
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO
DO ANYTHING!

THAT'S JUST IT. I FEEL
LIKE I DON'T BELONG
HERE. THIS HOUSE IS
WIFE AND MOTHER AND
NURSEMAID.

CAN I COMPETE WITH THE
AFRICAN VELD? CAN I CARE
FOR YOU AND THE CHILDREN
AS WELL AS THE HOUSE
CAN?



AND IT ISN'T
JUST ME. YOU'RE
BEGINNING TO FEEL
UNNECESSARY
TOO.



THEY CAN'T GET
OUT, CAN THEY?

OF COURSE
NOT.

NOW COME.
THE HOUSE WILL
HAVE DINNER READY
SOON.



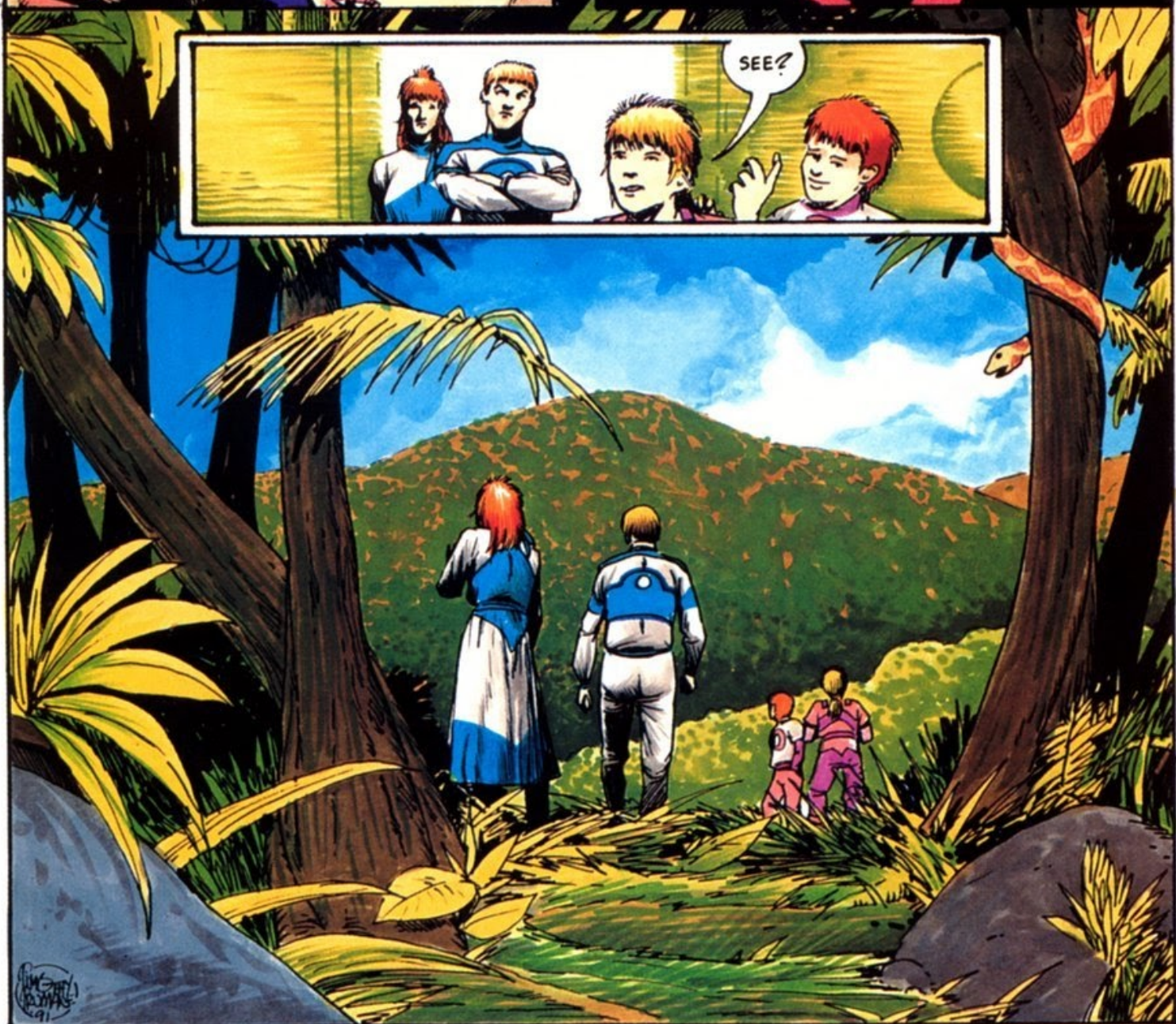




I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
THERE'S NO AFRICA IN
THE NURSERY.

I'M SURE
YOU'RE
MISTAKEN,
FATHER.

I'M NOT.
COME ALONG
NOW.



GO TO
BED.



DO YOU THINK WENDY CHANGED IT?

OF COURSE.

WHY?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT IT'S STAYING LOCKED UNTIL I FIND OUT.



DID YOU HEAR THAT?

YES. SCREAMS. AND THE ROAR OF LIONS. THEY'VE BROKEN INTO THE NURSERY.

THEY'VE BEEN ACTING FUNNY SINCE YOU FORBADE THEM TO ROCKET TO NEW YORK A FEW MONTHS AGO.



I EXPLAINED. THEY'RE TOO YOUNG TO DO THAT ALONE.



THOSE SCREAMS-- THEY SOUND FAMILIAR.

DO THEY?



YES.

AWFULLY.



FATHER, YOU AREN'T GOING TO LOCK UP THE NURSERY FOR GOOD ARE YOU? I THOUGHT WE WERE FREE TO PLAY AS WE WISHED.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE WERE THINKING OF TURNING THE WHOLE HOUSE OFF FOR ABOUT A MONTH... LIVE SORT OF ONE-FOR-ALL...



THAT SOUNDS DREADFUL! TIE OUR OWN SHOES? BRUSH OUR OWN TEETH AND COMB OUR HAIR?!

GIVE OURSELVES BATHS?!



WE'RE CONSIDERING IT. MIGHT BE FUN FOR A CHANGE.



I DON'T THINK YOU'D BETTER CONSIDER IT ANY MORE, FATHER!



I WON'T HAVE ANY THREATS FROM MY OWN SON, PETER!



VERY WELL.



GEORGE, DID YOU CALL DR. MCLEAN THIS MORNING LIKE YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO?

YES.

YES? WHAT DID YOU TELL HIM? WHAT DID HE SAY?

HE SAID IT FELT BAD. SAID THAT WE'D SPOILED OUR CHILDREN MORE THAN MOST!

WE'VE LET THAT ROOM AND THIS HOUSE REPLACE YOU AND ME! THAT ROOM IS THEIR MOTHER AND FATHER, FAR MORE IMPORTANT IN THEIR LIVES THAN THEIR REAL PARENTS!



NOW WE COME ALONG AND WANT TO SHUT IT OFF! WHERE THEY HAD A SANTA CLAUS, NOW THEY HAVE A SCROOGE!



DR. McCLEAN SAID TO TURN EVERYTHING OFF! HE WANTS THE WHOLE NURSERY TORN DOWN AND THE CHILDREN BROUGHT IN EVERY DAY FOR TREATMENT!

BUT WON'T THE SHOCK BE TOO MUCH FOR THE CHILDREN, SHUTTING THE ROOM OFF FOR GOOD?

WE CAN'T HAVE THEM GOING ANY DEEPER INTO THIS, THAT'S ALL!





GEORGE!

NO, LYDIA! IT GOES OFF, AND IT STAYS OFF! THE WHOLE HOUSE DIES AS OF HERE AND NOW!



NO!

YOU CAN'T DO THAT, TO THE NURSERY! YOU CAN'T!



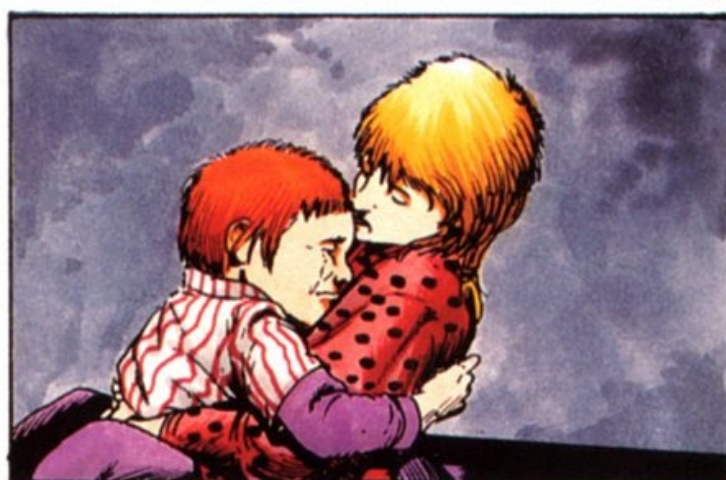
MY LORD, HOW WE NEED A BREATH OF HONEST AIR.



NO! NO! NO!



OH, GEORGE. LOOK AT THEM. YOU CAN'T BE SO ABRUPT! YOU CAN'T BE SO CRUEL!



OH, ALL RIGHT...



JUST FOR A MINUTE, MIND YOU.



OH, DADDY!
DADDY!
DADDY!

I DON'T IMAGINE
THE ROOM WILL
LIKE BEING TURNED
OFF.

NOTHING EVER
LIKES TO DIE --
NOT EVEN A
ROOM.



HELLO...

ISN'T THIS
YOURS, LYDIA?

WHY NO...
I'VE ...

MOMMY!
DADDY!
COME QUICK!



WENDY?!
PETER?!
/ /



WENDY! PETER!
OPEN THE DOOR!
OPEN UP!

G-GEORGE...?

LOOK...



NO...

...AND SUDDENLY GEORGE AND LYDIA HADLEY REALIZED WHY THE SCREAMS HAD SOUNDED SO FAMILIAR...



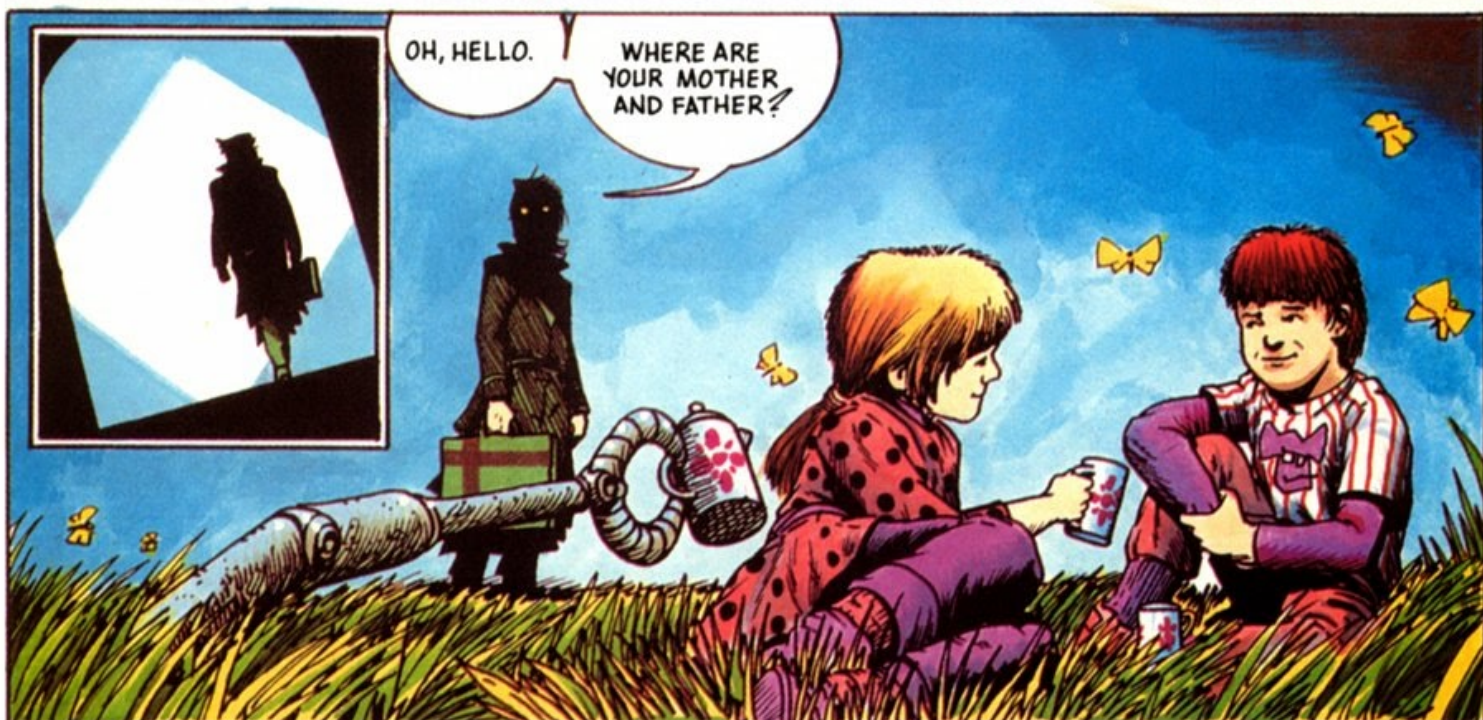
GEORGE?
LYDIA? HERE
I AM.

IT'S DR.
MCLEAN.



OH, HELLO.

WHERE ARE
YOUR MOTHER
AND FATHER?



OH, THEY'LL
BE ALONG
SHORTLY.



A CUP OF
TEA?



THE END.

GOTCHA !

Adapted by Ray Zone

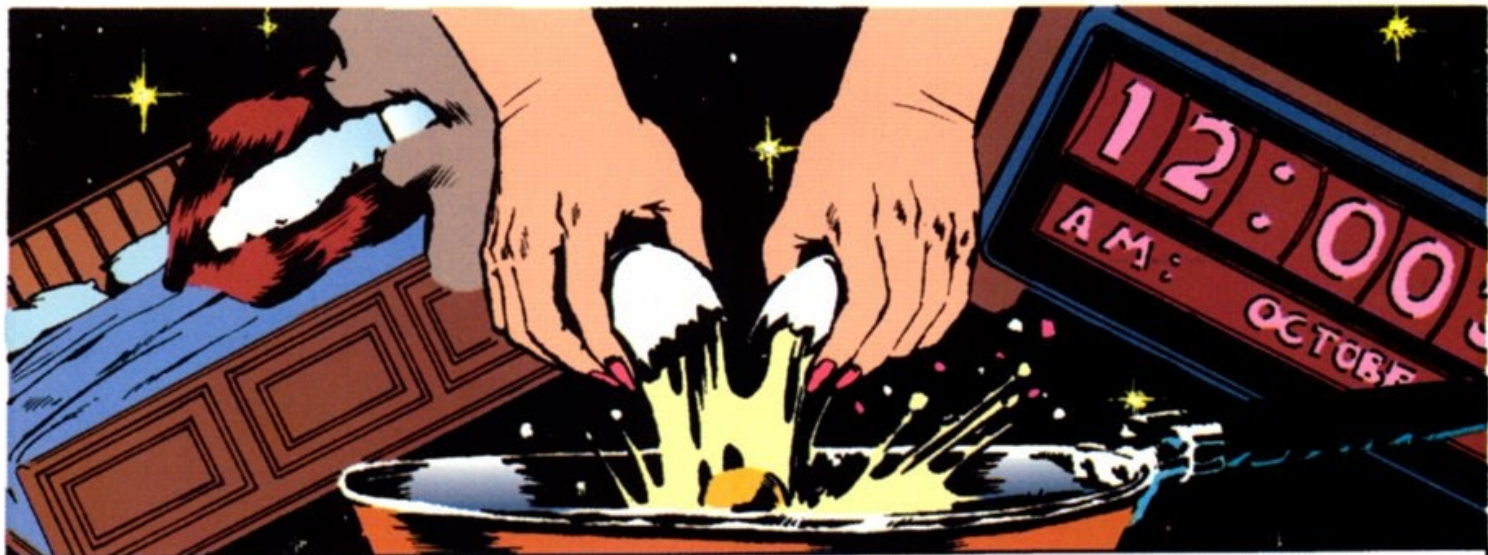
Illustrated by Chuck Roblin

GOTCHA! is a true story. It happened to me many years ago when I knew a very beautiful young woman whose love I was assured of. Then, one night, she asked me if I would like to play 'GOTCHA'. What's that? I asked. And she told and showed me. The final result was the end of a romance and the start and finish of the story here illustrated.

RAY B.

THEY WERE INCREDIBLY IN LOVE. THEY SAID IT. THEY KNEW IT. THEY LIVED IT. WHEN THEY WEREN'T STARING AT EACH OTHER THEY WERE HUGGING. WHEN THEY WEREN'T HUGGING THEY WERE KISSING. WHEN THEY WEREN'T KISSING THEY WERE A DOZEN SCRAMBLED EGGS IN BED. WHEN THEY WERE FINISHED WITH THE AMAZING OMELET THEY WENT BACK TO STARING AND MAKING NOISES.





THEIRS, IN SUM, WAS A LOVE AFFAIR. PRINT IT OUT IN CAPITALS. UNDERLINE IT. FIND SOME ITALICS. ADD EXCLAMATION POINTS. PUT UP THE FIREWORKS. TEAR DOWN THE CLOUDS. SEND OUT FOR SOME ADRENALINE. ROUSTABOUT AT THREE A.M. SLEEP TILL NOON.

HER NAME WAS BETH.



HIS NAME WAS CHARLES.



THEY HAD NO LAST NAMES. FOR THAT MATTER, THEY RARELY CALLED EACH OTHER BY THEIR FIRST NAMES. THEY FOUND NEW NAMES EVERY DAY FOR EACH OTHER, SOME OF THEM CAPABLE OF BEING SAID ONLY LATE AT NIGHT AND ONLY TO EACH OTHER.



IT WAS THE FOURTH OF JULY EVERY NIGHT. NEW YEARS EVERY DAWN. IT WAS THE HOME TEAM WINNING AND THE MOB ON THE FIELD. IT WAS A BOBSLED DOWNHILL AND EVERYTHING COLD RACING BY IN BEAUTY AND TWO WARM PEOPLE HOLDING TIGHT AND YELLING WITH JOY.



AND THEN... SOMETHING HAPPENED. AT BREAKFAST ABOUT ONE YEAR INTO THE CONNIPION FITS BETH WHISPERED, HALF UNDER HER BREATH.





THEY BOTH LAUGHED. BUT HER LAUGHTER WAS LOUDER THAN HIS.



IT WAS A LONG AND DELICIOUS DAY OF NAME CALLINGS AND RARE OMELETS AND A GOOD DINNER WITH A FINE WINE AND THEN SOME READING JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT. HE SUDDENLY LOOKED OVER AT HER AND SPOKE.

HAVEN'T WE FORGOTTEN SOMETHING?

WHAT?



LET'S PUT OUT MOST OF THE LIGHTS. JUST KEEP THE SMALL LAMP BY THE BED.

NOW YOU STAY RIGHT THERE. YOU DON'T MOVE, SEE?

YOU JUST WAIT. AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS-- OKAY?

AT TIMES LIKE THESE SHE WAS A TEN YEAR OLD GIRL SCOUT RUSHING ABOUT WITH SOME POISONED COOKIES ON A GRAND LARK. HE WAS ALWAYS READY IT SEEMED TO EAT THE COOKIES.

NOW, BE VERY QUIET. NO TALKING. LET ME TALK IF I WANT TO, OKAY?

OKAY, PROCEED!

OKAY.



SHE SANK DOWN LIKE THE DARK WITCH, MELTING, MELTING, AT THE FOOT OF THE BED. SHE LET HER BONES COLLAPSE SOFTLY. HER HEAD AND HER HAIR FOLLOWED HER JAPANESE PAPER-LANTERN BODY DOWN, FOLD ON FOLD, UNTIL THE AIR AT THE FOOT OF THE BED WAS EMPTY.



HERE GOES.



WELL DONE.

YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO TALK. SH-H.



I'M SH-H-H-ED.



SILENCE. A MINUTE PASSED. NOTHING.



HE SMILED A LOT, WAITING.



ANOTHER MINUTE PASSED. SILENCE. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE SHE WAS.



FIVE MINUTES PASSED. THE ROOM SEEMED TO GET SOMEWHAT DARKER. HE FIXED HIS PILLOW AND PEERED ABOUT THE ROOM. HE COULD SEE THE LIGHT FROM THE BATHROOM SHINING ON THE WALL.



THERE WAS A SOUND LIKE A SMALL MOUSE IN ONE FAR CORNER OF THE ROOM. HE LOOKED THERE, BUT COULD SEE NOTHING.



ANOTHER MINUTE PASSED. HE CLEARED HIS THROAT. THERE WAS A WHISPER FROM THE BATHROOM DOOR, DOWN NEAR THE FLOOR. HE GLANCED THAT WAY AND GRINNED AND WAITED. NOTHING.

ARE YOU STILL AT THE FOOT OF THE BED? Oh, SORRY. NOT SUPPOSED TO TALK!

HE THOUGHT HE FELT SOMETHING CRAWLING UNDER THE BED. THE SENSATION PASSED. HE SWALLOWED AND BLINKED.



THE ROOM SEEMED ALMOST CANDLE LIT. THERE WAS A SOURRY LIKE A GREAT SPIDER ON THE FLOOR, BUT NOTHING WAS VISIBLE.



AFTER A LONG WHILE HER VOICE MURMURED TO HIM LIKE AN ECHO, NOW FROM THIS SIDE OF THE DARK ROOM, NOW FROM THAT.



AND SHE WAS GONE AGAIN FOR ANOTHER TWO MINUTES. HE WAS BEGINNING TO FEEL HIS PULSE JUMP IN HIS WRISTS. HE LOOKED AT THE LEFT WALL, THEN THE RIGHT, THEN THE CEILING.



AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS A WHITE SPIDER CRAWLING ALONG THE FOOT OF THE BED. NO SOONER THERE THAN GONE.



SOMETHING RAN INTO THE BATHROOM. THE BATHROOM LIGHT WENT OUT. SILENCE. HE SAT WONDERING WHY THEY WERE DOING THIS.



THE WATCH TICKED ON HIS WRIST. HIS BREATH WAS LONG AND SOMEWHAT PAINFUL. HIS FINGERS MOVED ON THE QUILT ALL TO THEMSELVES AS IF TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM HIM.



SOMETHING STIRRED IN THE CLOSET DIRECTLY ACROSS THE ROOM. THE DOOR SLOWLY OPENED ON AN ABYSS AS DEEP AS THE SPACES BETWEEN THE STARS.



THERE WAS A RUNNING OF FEET IN THE BATHROOM. THERE WAS A FAINT MOAN. WATER DRIPPED IN THE SINK SUDDENLY DROP BY SLOW DROP.



A WINDOW OPENED
SOMEWHERE. A COOL
WIND BLEW A PHAN-
TOM OF CURTAIN OUT
ON THE AIR.



BETH.

NO ANSWER.



I
DON'T
LIKE
THIS.

NO BREATHING, EVEN.
ANYWHERE.



BETH? I
DON'T LIKE
THIS GAME!

SILENCE.



YOU
HEAR ME,
BETH?

I DON'T
LIKE THIS
GAME.



LET'S STOP
THE GAME
BETH. ANSWER
ME. WHERE
ARE YOU?

BETH...
YOU
OKAY?



BETH?



HE HEARD THE SHRIEK, THE CRY,
THE SCREAM.

OHNNNNNNNN!!



BETH!

A SHADOW SPRANG UP. A GREAT
DARKNESS LEAPED UPON THE BED.
IT LANDED ON FOUR LEGS.

OHNNNNNNNN!!



GOTCHA!



BETH!

ANOTHER GREAT LEAP AND THE DARK THING
LANDED ON HIS CHEST. COLD HANDS SEIZED HIS
NECK. A WHITE FACE PLUNGED DOWN. A MOUTH
GASPED AND SHREIKED.

THE EYES RAVED WIDE AND
THE NOSTRILS FLARED
WITH BREATH AS COLD AS
POLAR WIND. THE FACE
WAS SO FULL OF EVIL
GLEE, SO BRIMFUL OF
MALEVOLENCE THAT HE
HAD TO SHREIK AGAIN.



NO!
NO! NO!
STOP!
STOP!

GOTCHA!

IT WAS SOMEONE HE'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
A WOMAN FROM SOME TIME AHEAD WHEN
DARKNESS HAD GATHERED AND BOREDOM
HAD POISONED AND WORDS HAD KILLED.
NO RESIDUES OF LOVE,,, ONLY HATE,
ONLY DEATH.



HE BURST INTO
TEARS. HE
BEGAN TO SOB.



NO! Oh,
GOD! STOP!

SHE STOPPED. HER HANDS WENT AWAY COLD AND CAME BACK WARM TO TOUCH. HOLD AND PET HIM. AND IT WAS BETH.

OH, CHARLIE. I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN...

YOU DID. OH, GOD, YOU DID. YOU DID!

HIS GREIF WAS UNCONTROLLABLE. SHE BURST INTO TEARS HERSELF.

NO. NO. OH, CHARLIE!

SHE FLUNG HERSELF OUT OF BED AND RAN AROUND TURNING ON LIGHTS. BUT NONE OF THEM WERE BRIGHT ENOUGH.

I'M SORRY. CHARLIE, LISTEN, SORRY. I DIDN'T...

YOU DID!

IT WAS ONLY A GAME!

FINALLY HIS CRYING STOPPED AND SHE WAS WARM AS HE LAY AGAINST HER. HIS PULSES STOPPED FLUTTERING. THE CONSTRICTION AROUND HIS CHEST LET GO.

DON'T EVER DO THAT AGAIN!

A GAME! YOU CALL THAT A GAME?!

I SWEAR, I PROMISE. AM I FORGIVEN, CHARLIE?

HE LAY A LONG WHILE AND AT LAST NODDED, AS IF IT HAD TAKEN SOME HARD THINKING.

FORGIVEN.



SHALL I TURN THE LIGHTS OFF, CHARLIE?

NO... NO.



WE HAVE TO HAVE THE LIGHTS OFF TO SLEEP, CHARLIE.

LEAVE A FEW ON FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

HE TOOK A SHUDDERING BREATH AND CAME DOWN WITH A CHILL. HE SHOOK FOR FIVE MINUTES BEFORE HER HOLDING HIM AND KISSING HIM MADE THE SHIVER AND THE TREMBLE GO AWAY.

AN HOUR LATER SHE THOUGHT HE WAS ASLEEP AND GOT UP AND TURNED OFF ALL THE LIGHTS SAVE THE BATHROOM. GETTING BACK INTO BED SHE FELT HIM STIR. HIS VOICE WAS VERY SMALL AND VERY LOST.



ALL RIGHT. FOR A LITTLE WHILE.



Oh, BETH. I LOVED YOU SO MUCH.



SHE WEIGHED HIS WORDS.

CORRECTION. YOU LOVE ME SO MUCH.

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH.



IT TOOK HER AN HOUR STARING AT THE CEILING, TO GO TO SLEEP.

THE NEXT MORNING AT BREAK-FAST HE BUTTERED HIS TOAST AND LOOKED AT HER. SHE SAT CALMLY MUNCHING HER BACON.

BETH?

WHAT?

HOW COULD HE TELL HER? SOMETHING IN HIM WAS COLD. THE BACON WAS BURNED. THE TOAST WAS BLACK. SHE LOOKED VERY PALE. HE COULD FEEL HIS HEART, LIKE A TIRED FIST, POUND DIMLY AGAINST SOME LOCKED DOOR SOMEWHERE.

I...
WE...

HOW COULD HE TELL HER THAT SUDDENLY HE WAS AFRAID? SUDDENLY HE SENSED THAT THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END. AND BEYOND THE END THERE WOULD NEVER BE ANYONE TO GO TO ANYWHERE AT ANYTIME--NO ONE IN ALL THE WORLD.

NOTHING...

FIVE MINUTES LATER SHE SPOKE.

CHARLES, DO YOU WANT TO PLAY THE GAME TONIGHT? BUT THIS TIME IT'S YOU WHO HIDES AND JUMPS OUT AND SAYS, "GOTCHA!"

HE WAITED BECAUSE HE COULD NOT BREATHE. HE DID NOT WANT TO KNOW THAT PART OF HIMSELF. TEARS SPRANG TO HIS EYES.

NO.
Oh, NO.

HOMECOMING

Adapted by Steve Leialoha

I grew up in a small town in Northern Illinois where, for my family anyway, Halloween was just as good if not better than Christmas. My aunts and uncles and my grandmother flung themselves into the October ritual in a flurry of broomsticks and candlewax. My favorite aunt, Neva, flivvered me out into the farmlands to harvest cornstalks and pumpkins. We gathered in various kitchens[three Bradbury families lived on one block] to pull taffy, cut pumpkin faces, and prepare my grandparents house for the influx of neighbors and school chums. Bobbing for apples without drowning in the washtub was mandatory. The grand finale of the night was passing the cut-up parts of a witch from hand to hand in a dark room. "Here's her heart, here's her gizzard, here's her brain!" All that good stuff. As you can see, it was a grand and jolly time for me, growing up and living with every Halloween until I was 14. It was only natural, in my twenties, that I would remember my glorious family and their All Hallows' festivities and trap them all, with their real names, in my celebratory tale HOMECOMING. If my family had not existed, the following long-after-sunset adventure could never have been born.

RAY B.

Here they come...

where?

Some are over Europe...

Some over Asia...

the islands...

South America...

who are they?

Uncle Einar and Uncle Fry and there's Cousin William

I see Frulda and Helgar and...

Aunt Morgiana Cousin Vivian

and I see Uncle Johann!

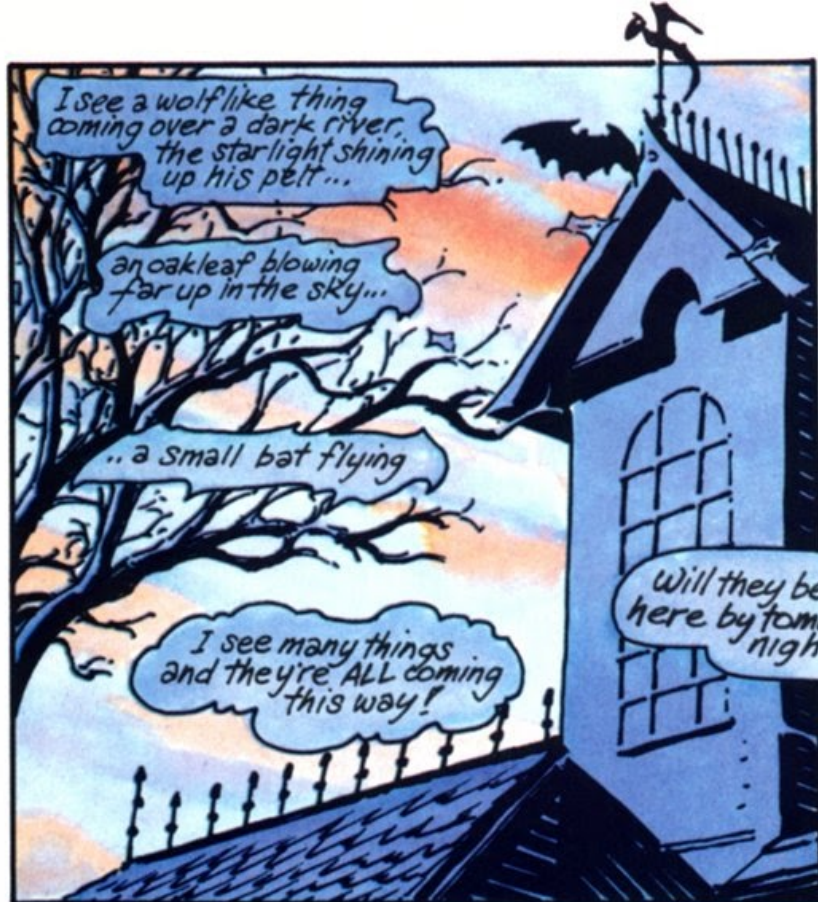
They're all coming fast!

are they up in the sky?

They're coming through the air and traveling along the ground...

in many forms

THE
RAY BRADBURY
HOMECOMING
OCTOBER
COUNTRY
2011





OH, TO HAVE STRONG TEETH WITH INCISORS LIKE STEEL SPIKES, OR STRONG HANDS, EVEN, OR A STRONG MIND. TO SEND ONE'S MIND OUT, FREE, AS CECY DID.



BUT NO, HE WAS THE IMPERFECT ONE.

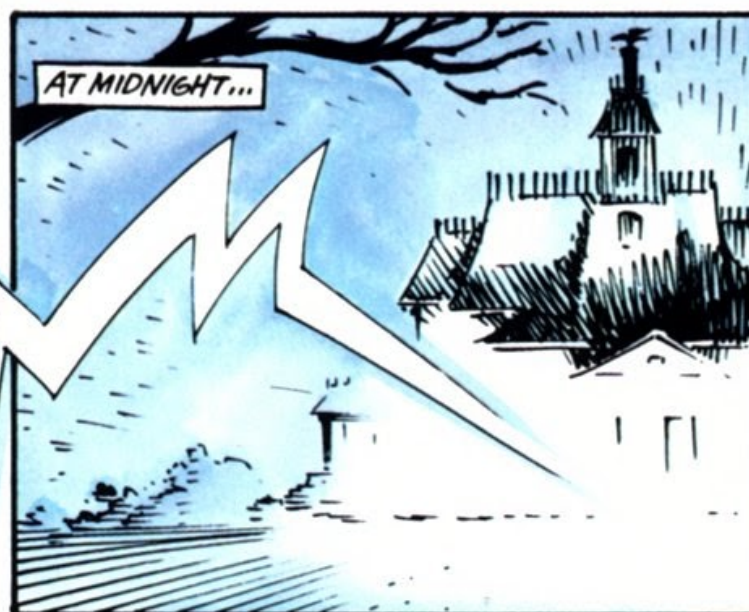
THE SICK ONE.

HE WAS EVEN—
AFRAID OF THE DARK!

NO WONDER THE FAMILY SKIRTED HIM LIKE A HOLY MAN'S CRUCIFIX.







FROM THEN ON PEOPLE ARRIVED EACH HOUR...

MOTHER FILLED THE
LARGE CRYSTAL PUNCH
BOWL FROM THE JUGS
BION HAD CARRIED
HOME..

FATHER SWEEP
FROM ROOM TO
ROOM LIGHTING
MORE TAPERS.

AND TIMOTHY STOOD AMIDST
THIS WILD EXCITEMENT, HANDS
TREMBLING, GAZING NOW
HERE, NOW THERE..

DARKNESS, SOUND OF
WIND, THE WEBBED
THUNDER OF WINGS..

THE PADDING OF FEET..

THE WELCOMING BURSTS
OF TALK AT ENTRANCES..

THE SHADOWS
PASSING, COMING,
GOING, WAVERING.

WELL, WELL AND THIS
MUST BE TIMOTHY!

what?

A GOOD LAD, A
FINE LAD!

Timothy,
this is
Uncle
Jason.

Hello
Uncle
Jason.

and over here...

TIMOTHY
STOOD
ALONE.

FROM OFF A THOUSAND
MILES IN THE DARKNESS
HE HEARD A HIGH VOICE;
THAT WAS ELLEN-

... AND MY BROTHERS,
THEY ARE CLEVER.

CAN YOU GUESS
THEIR OCCUPATIONS
AUNT MORGIANA?

I have
no idea.

THEY OPERATE
THE UNDERTAKING
ESTABLISHMENT
IN TOWN.

what?

YES!

ISN'T THAT
PRICELESS!



THEY BRING HOME SUSTENANCE FOR MAMA AND PAPA AND ALL OF US...

EXCEPT, OF COURSE, TIMOTHY!

WELL? COME NOW. WHAT ABOUT TIMOTHY?

Oh, Laura, your tongue.



LAURA WENT ON WITH IT...

TIMOTHY DOESN'T... WELL...

DOESN'T LIKE BLOOD!

HE'S DELICATE.

He'll learn.

He's my son and he'll learn. He's only fourteen.



BUT I WAS RAISED ON THE STUFF...

UNCLE JASON...

HIS VOICE PASSING FROM ONE ROOM ON INTO ANOTHER...

PASSING AWAY INTO FAINTNESS.



Well it's all my fault. I tried forcing him.

You can't force children, you only make them sick, and they never get a taste for things.

I UNDERSTAND. TIMOTHY WILL COME AROUND.

I'm sure he will.

TIMOTHY WAS COLD. HE SMELLED THE HOT TALLOW AND INSTINCTIVELY GRABBED AT A CANDLE AND WALKED AROUND AND ABOUT THE HOUSE PRETENDING TO STRAIGHTEN THE CREPE.

TIMOTHY...

TIMOTHY IS AFRAID OF THE DARK...

LEONARD'S VOICE.



HATEFUL LEONARD!

I like the candle that's all.



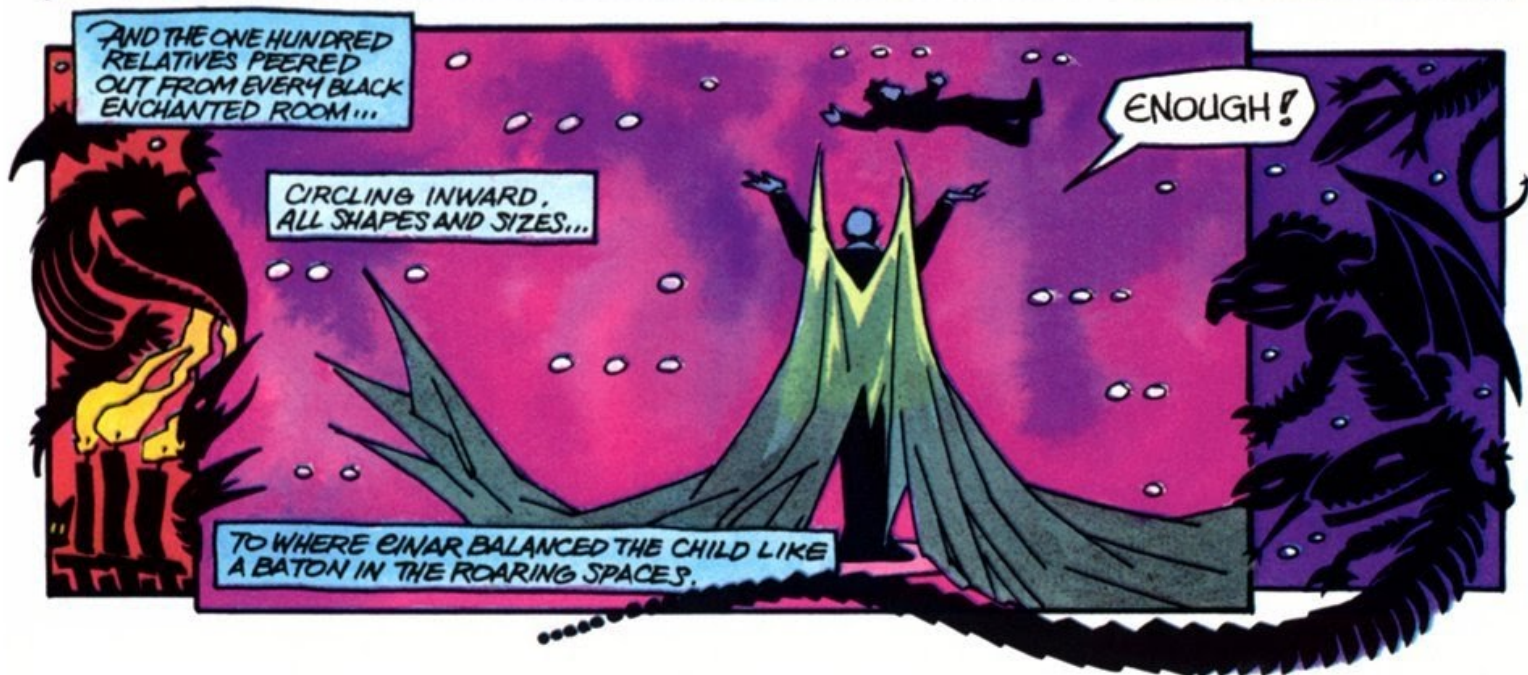
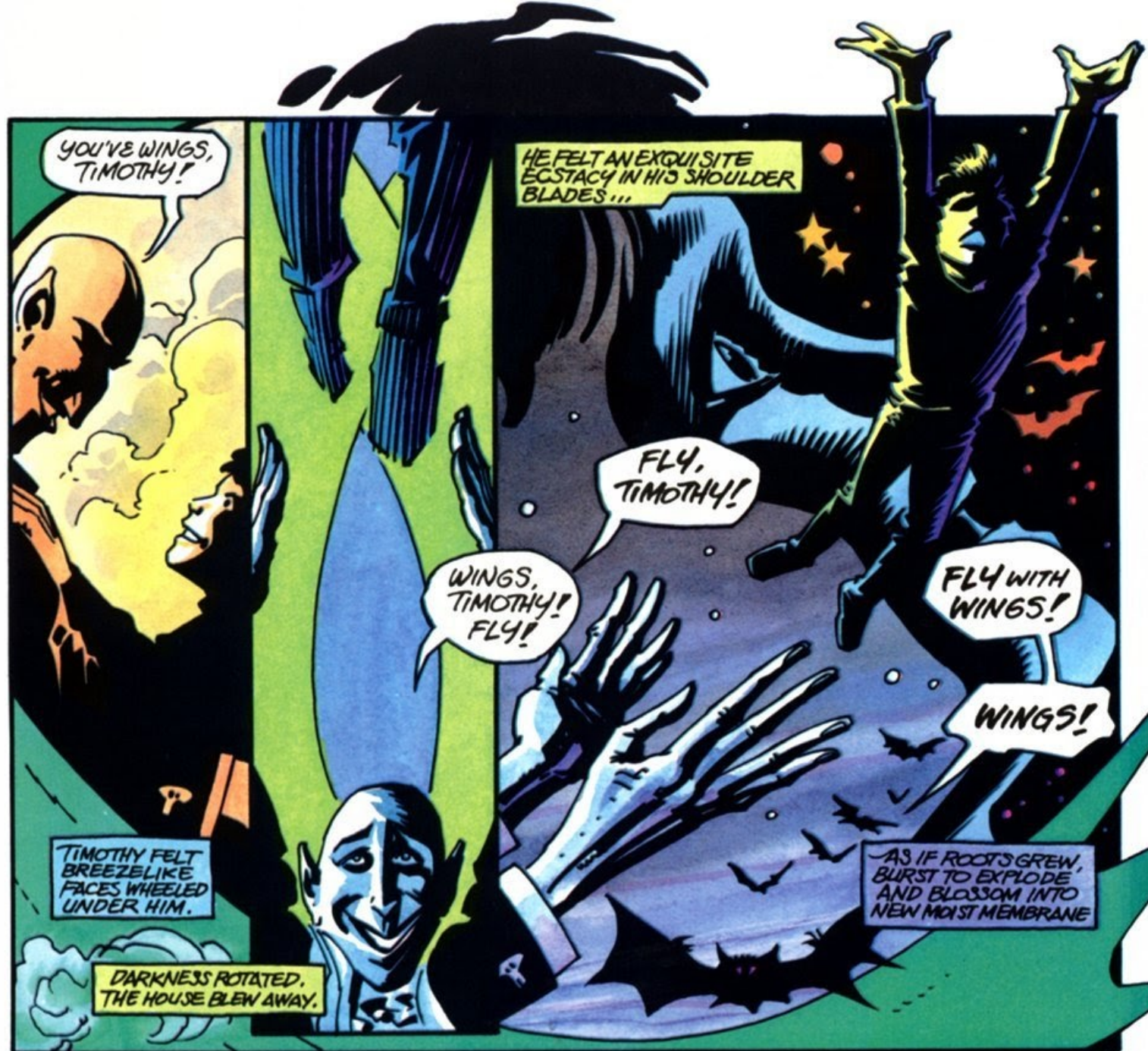
CASCADES OF ROARING LAUGHTER.

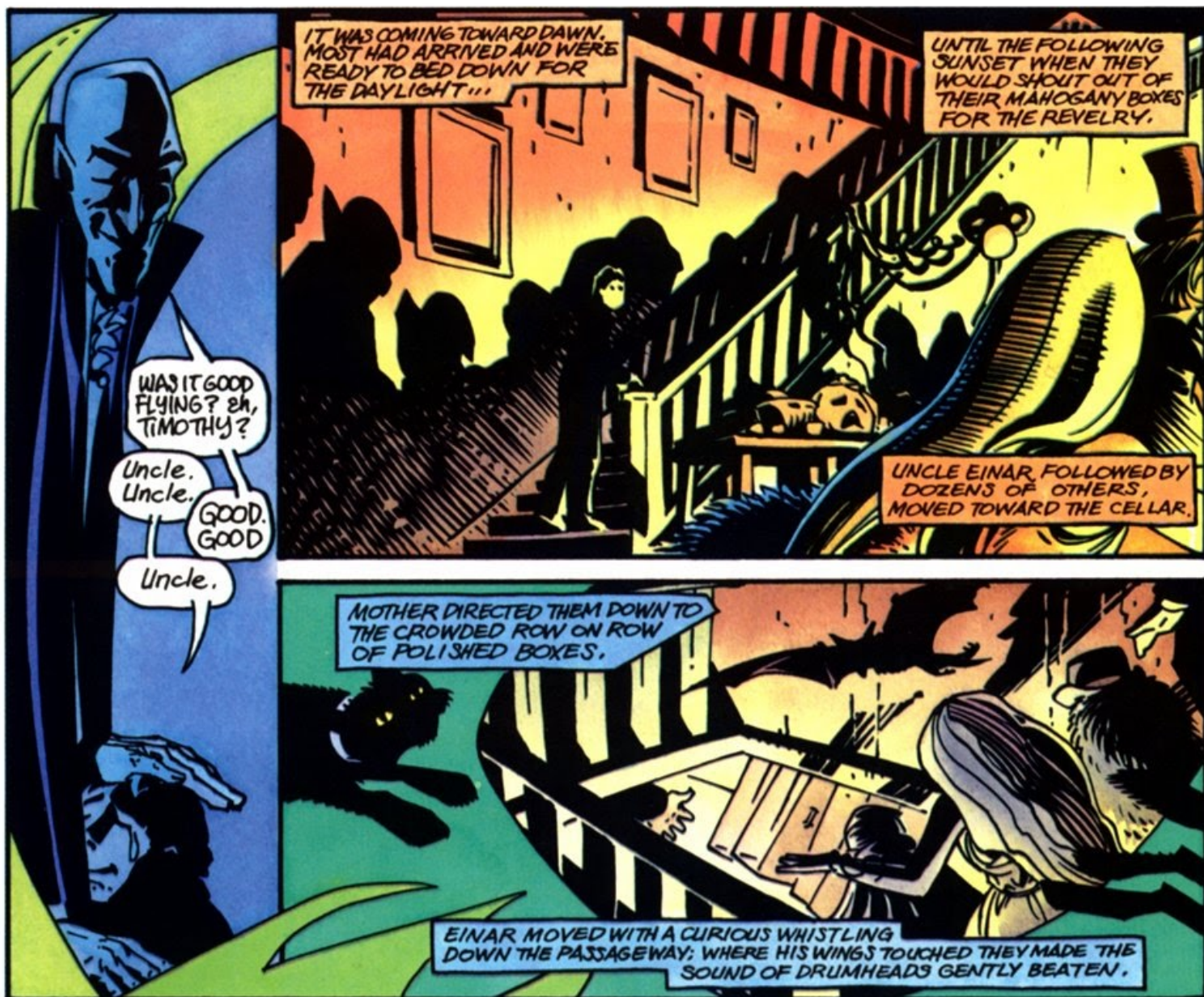
CLAMMY FOG SWEEPED THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR...

MORE LIGHTNING, MORE THUNDER.



Uncle Einar!









Cecy
Where
are you
now,
Cecy?

...in the Imperial Valley...
besides the Salton Sea..

near the mud pots...

and the steam
and the quiet...

I'm in a farmer's wife..
I'm sitting on a front
porch..

I can make her
move if I want or
do anything...

or think
anything.

What's it like, Cecy?

you can hear the mud pots hissing...

Inside this woman's skull I am,
looking out, watching the sea
that does not move...

and there is a smell of
deep sulphurous burning
and old time...

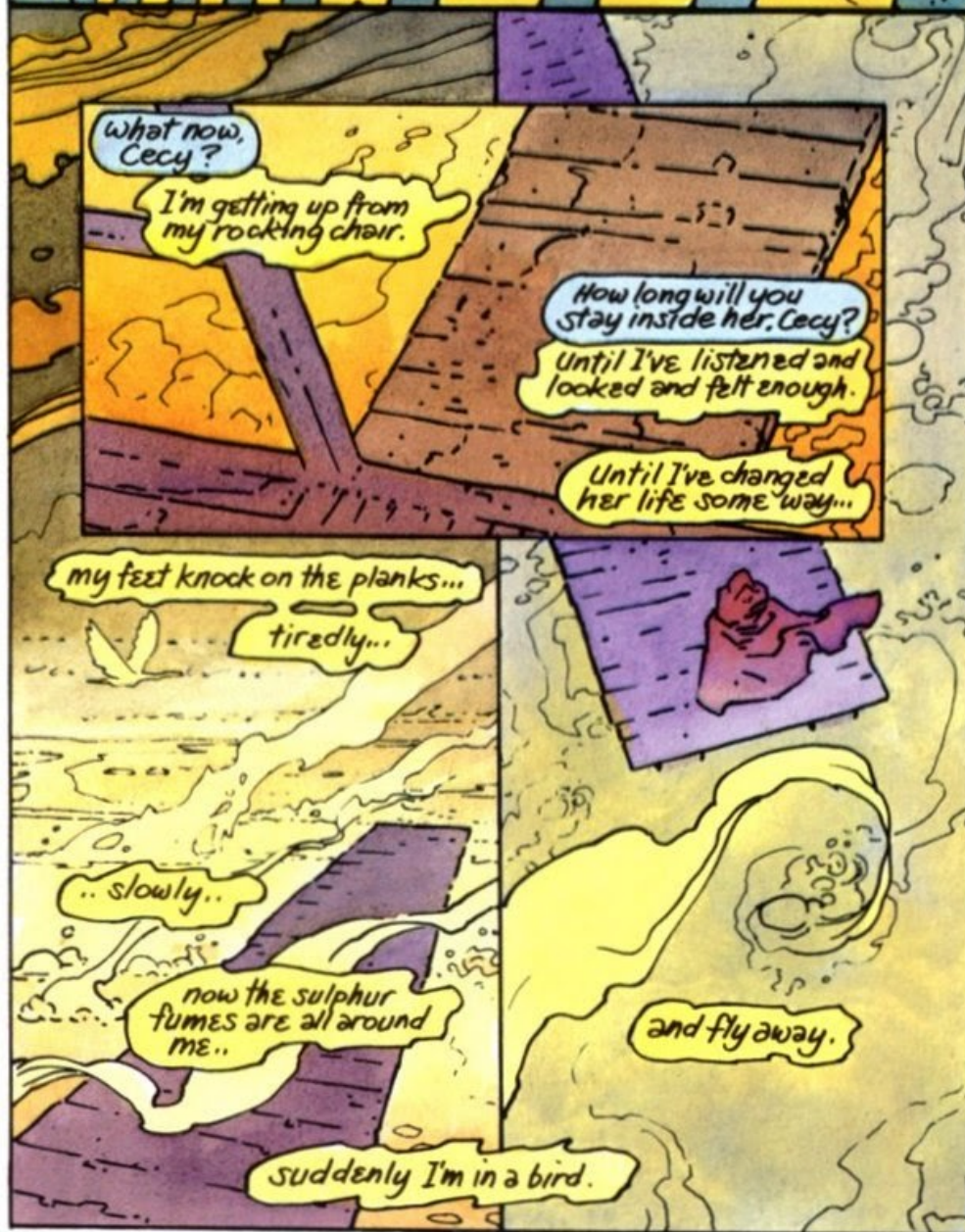
and is so quiet it
makes you afraid.

The dinosaur has been
abroiling here ten
million years.

I sit on the porch and
wait for my husband to
come home.

Is he done
yet, Cecy?

yes, he's done.
quite done.



What now,
Cecy?

I'm getting up from
my rocking chair.

How long will you
stay inside her, Cecy?
Until I've listened and
looked and felt enough.

Until I've changed
her life some way...

my feet knock on the planks...

tiredly...

... slowly..

now the sulphur
fumes are all around
me..

and fly away.

suddenly I'm in a bird.



I keep flying...

circle back..

I see a hand
wriggle and
disappear into
the pool...

now I'm flying home..

swift--

swift--



Swift----

Now I'm home!



The Homecoming's on and everybody's here!

Then why are you upstairs?

Well, ask me what you came to ask.

I didn't come to ask anything...



well almost nothing..

well...

Ofi, Cecy!



I want to do something at the party to make them look at me...

Something to make me good as them...

Something to make me belong, but there's nothing I can do and I feel funny and..

well...

I thought you...

might..



I might.

stand up straight.

stand very still.

Now shut your eyes and blank out your thought.

Shall we go downstairs now, Timothy?

LIKE A HAND INTO A GLOVE, CECY WAS WITHIN HIM...



Look everybody!





HE WHISPERED TO SISTER LAURA IN A SUBTLE VOICE THAT KEPT HER SILENT...

FROZEN...

HE FELT TALL AS THE TREES AS HE WALKED TO HER.

THE PARTY NOW SLOWED, IT WAITED ON ALL SIDES OF HIM, WATCHING.



FROM ALL THE ROOM DOORS THE FACES PEERED.

THEY WERE NOT LAUGHING...

THE WIND CLIMBED AROUND ON THE ROOF OUTSIDE.

MOTHER WAS ASTONISHED, DAD WAS PLEASED AND GETTING PROUDER EVERY INSTANT.



Look Uncle Einar!

I can fly at last!

STOP, TIMOTHY!

HEY!

HALFWAY DOWN, THE WINGS HE THOUGHT HE OWNED...



DISSOLVED!



This is Cecy!
This is Cecy!



Come see me,
all of you,
Upstairs..

First room on
the left.
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha



AS THE RELATIVES FLOWED TOWARDS
CECY'S ROOM TO CONGRATULATE HER...

Cecy, I hate you!



I hate you...

FROM THE PROTECTION OF
THE MATCHBOX HE USED
FOR HIS RETREAT, THE
SPIDER CRAWLED FORTH..

Don't,
Spid.
Don't.



Don't, Spid.

HE SOBBED
SOMEWHAT LESS.



Go away,
Spid.



IN THE HOUSE HE COULD
HEAR MIRROR MIRROR
BEING PLAYED...

TIMOTHY



DON'T FEEL BADLY, NEPHEW TIMOTHY. EACH TO HIS OWN IN HIS OWN WAY.

HOW MUCH BETTER THINGS ARE FOR YOU.

HOW RICH.

THE WORLD'S DEAD FOR US. WE'VE SEEN SO MUCH OF IT BELIEVE ME.

LIFE'S BEST TO THOSE WHO LIVE THE LEAST OF IT.

IT'S WORTH MORE PER OUNCE, TIMOTHY, REMEMBER THAT.

THE REST OF THE BLACK MORNING FROM MIDNIGHT ON, UNCLE EINAR LED HIM ABOUT THE HOUSE WEAVING AND SINGING.

A HORDE OF LATE ARRIVALS SET THE ENTIRE HILARITY AFRESH.

GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GREAT AND A THOUSAND MORE GREAT-GREATS GRANDMOTHER WAS THERE. NUMEROUS YOUNG COUSINS CAROUSED AT THE CRYSTAL PUNCH BOWL...

TO TIMOTHY THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF THINGS TO HEAR AND WATCH.

LISTEN!

THE PARTY HELD ITS BREATH. FAR AWAY THE TOWN CLOCK STRUCK ITS CHIMES, SAYING SIX O'CLOCK.

THE PARTY WAS ENDING.

IN TIME TO THE RHYTHM OF THE STRIKING CLOCK THEIR ONE HUNDRED VOICES BEGAN TO SING SONGS THAT WERE FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OLD...

SONGS TIMOTHY COULD NOT KNOW. ARMS TWINED, CIRCLING SLOWLY...

THEY SANG

TIMOTHY SANG. HE KNEW NO WORDS, NO TUNE, YET THE WORDS AND TUNE CAME ROUND AND HIGH AND GOOD.

you're forgiven.

Thanks, Cecy.

thanks.

THEN HE JUST RELAXED AND LET THE WORDS MOVE, WITH CECY'S VOICE, FREE FROM HIS LIPS.

GOODBYES WERE SAID, THERE WAS A GREAT RUSTLING!!!

MOTHER AND FATHER STOOD AT THE DOOR TO SHAKE HANDS AND KISS EACH DEPARTING RELATIVE IN TURN!!!

A COLD WIND ENTERED, AND TIMOTHY FELT HIMSELF SEIZED AND SETTLED IN ONE BODY AFTER ANOTHER!!!

FELT CECY PRESS HIM INTO UNCLE FRY'S HEAD..

AS INSIDE COLLISIN WILLIAM!!!

LIKE A PEBBLE IN UNCLE EINAR'S MOUTH..

HE WAS BACK FOR ALL TIME, IN HIS OWN BODY.

THEN LEAPED UP OVER THE HOUSE AND AWAKENING HILLS

HE PANTED AND DISSOLVED AWAY!!!

TIMOTHY FLEW IN A WEBBED THUNDER, FILLING THE SKY.

AND THEN!!!

IN THE GROWING DAWN, THE LAST FEW WERE EMBRACING AND CRYING!!!

AND THINKING HOW THE WORLD WAS BECOMING LESS A PLACE FOR THEM.

THERE HAD BEEN A TIME WHEN THEY HAD MET EVERY YEAR, BUT NOW DECADES PASSED WITH NO RECONCILIATION.

Don't forget we meet in Salem in 2015!

Salem.

Salem. 2015.

AND THERE WOULD BE UNCLE FRY AND A THOUSAND-TIMES GREAT GRANDMOTHER, AND MOTHER AND FATHER AND ELLEN AND LAURA AND CECY AND ALL THE REST.

BUT WOULD HE BE THERE? COULD HE BE CERTAIN OF STAYING ALIVE UNTIL THEN?

WITH ONE LAST WITHERING BLAST, AWAY THEY ALL WENT..



SO MANY MIDNIGHTS AND
INSANITIES AND DREAMS...

No. We'll clean
tonight.

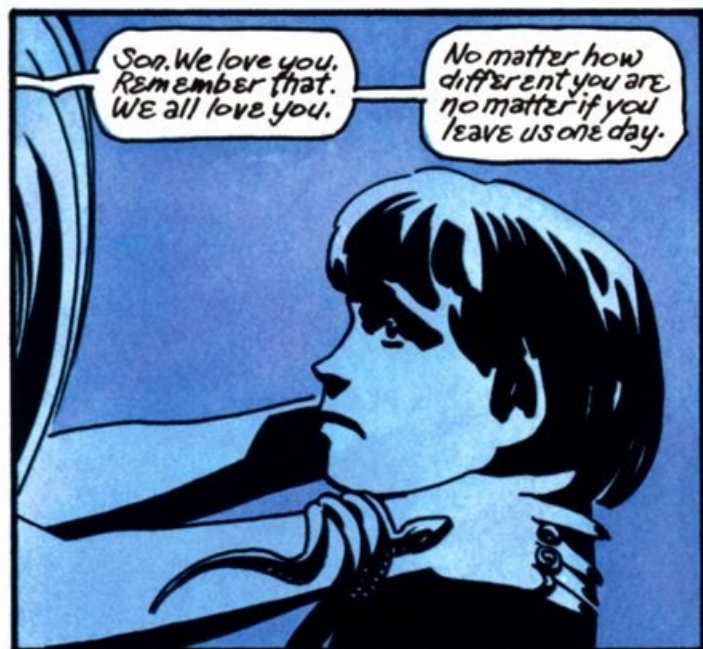
NOW WE
need our
sleep.

AND THE FAMILY
VANISHED DOWN
CELLAR AND
UPSTAIRS...



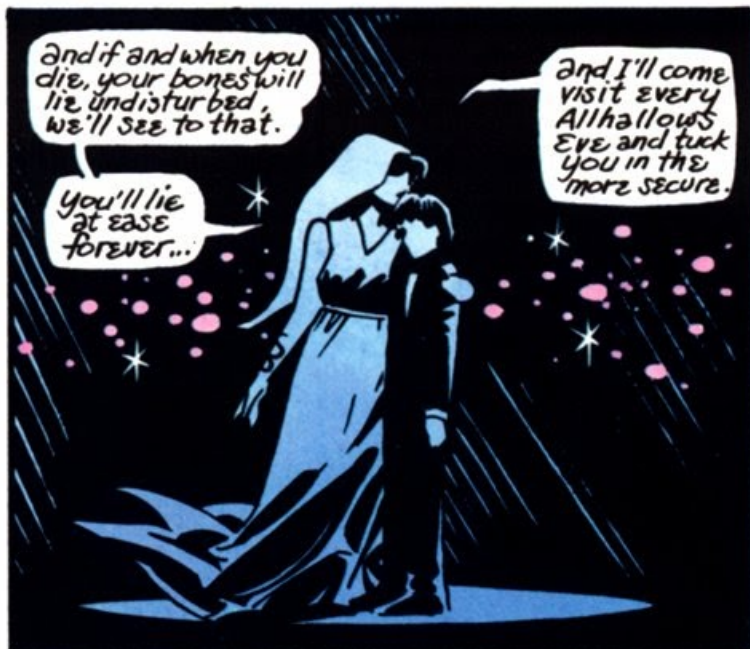
Timothy.

PASSING A PARTY
MIRROR TIMOTHY
SAW THE PALE
MORTALITY OF
HIS FACE ALL COLD
AND TREMBLING.



Son. We love you.
Remember that.
WE all love you.

No matter how
different you are
no matter if you
leave us one day.



And if and when you
die, your bones will
lie undisturbed,
we'll see to that.

you'll lie
at ease
forever...

and I'll come
visit every
Allhallow's
Eve and tuck
you in the
more secure.



THE HOUSE WAS SILENT. FAR
AWAY THE WIND WENT OVER A
HILL WITH ITS LAST CARGO OF
DARK BATS, ECHOING, CHITTERING.

TIMOTHY WALKED UP THE
STEPS, ONE BY ONE,
CRYING TO HIMSELF
ALL THE WAY.

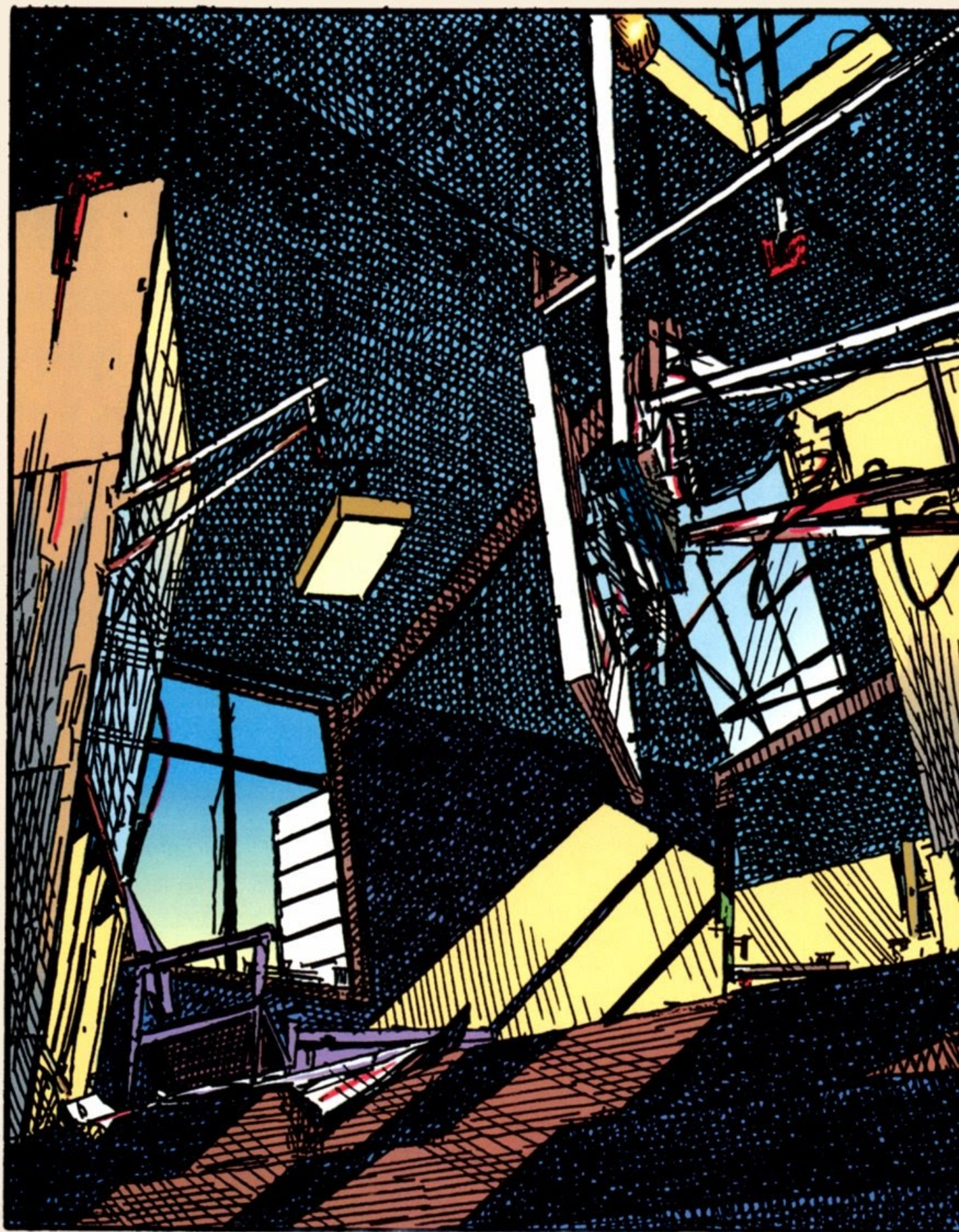
My life has been filled with poetry, before and after I married my wife, Marguerite. Before her there was Shakespeare and Robert Frost and Poe. After our marriage, when we walked around Los Angeles [we couldn't afford a car, so we walked everywhere or took an occasional bus] she would quote favorite poems to me. Emily Dickinson and Lord Byron and, one night, **THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS** by Sara Teasdale. I was so affected by the poem that I knew I must do something with it; give it as a gift to others, but also celebrate it by putting it into the framework of a story.

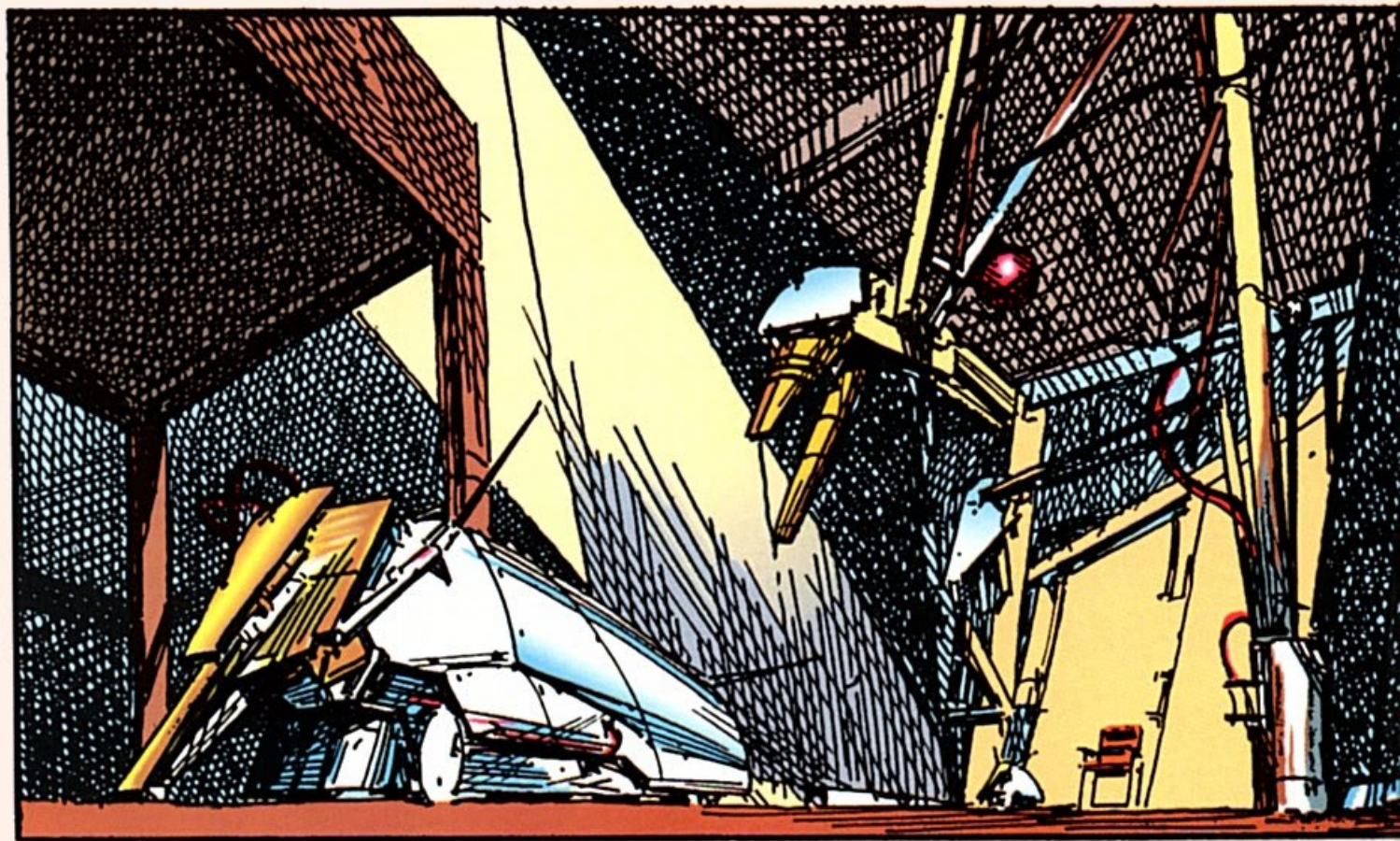
(continued on page 73)

THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS

Adapted by Lebbeus Woods

THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS





In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* The morning house lay empty.

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in the city of Allendale, California. Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."



Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels.

It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today . . ." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, time to clean.



Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

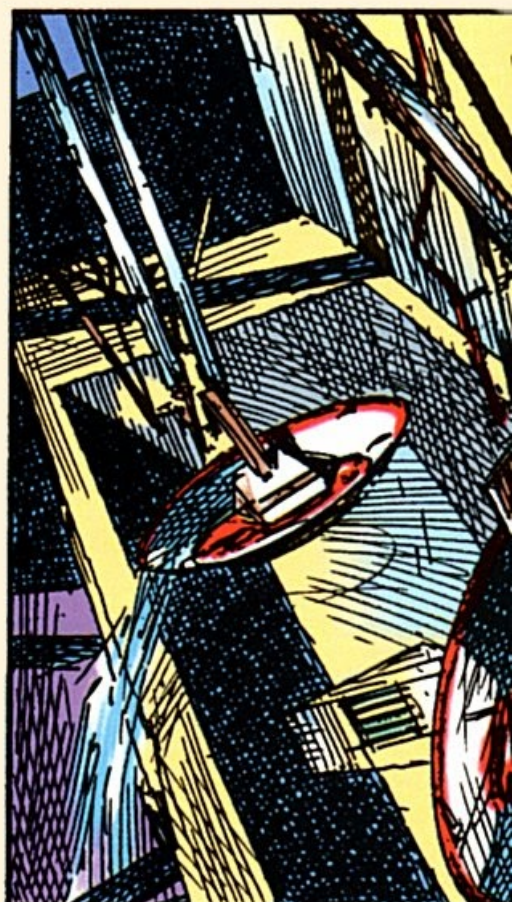
Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.



Ten-fifteen. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images

burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled laver.



The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting

no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

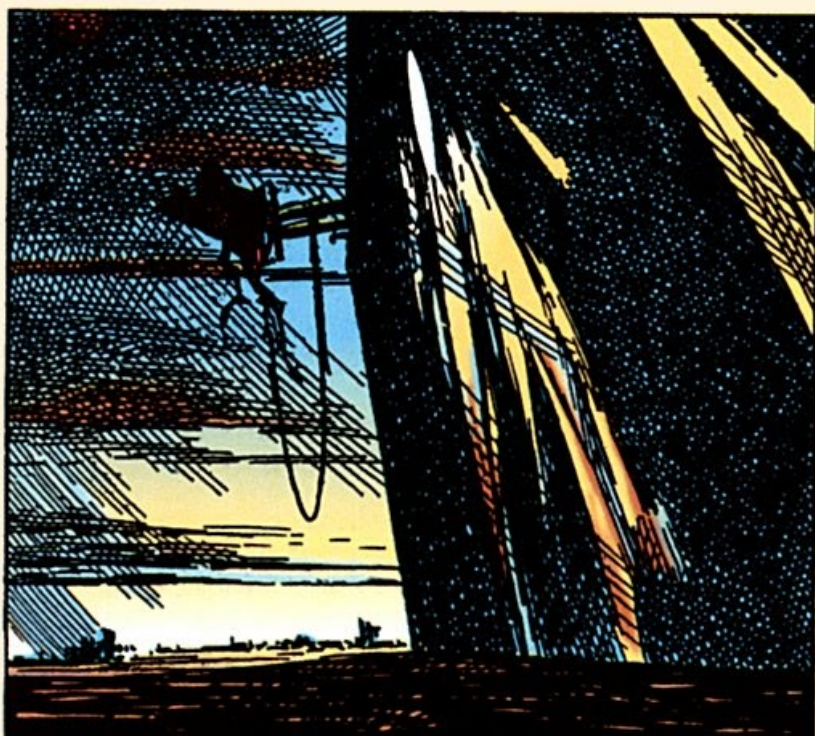
It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

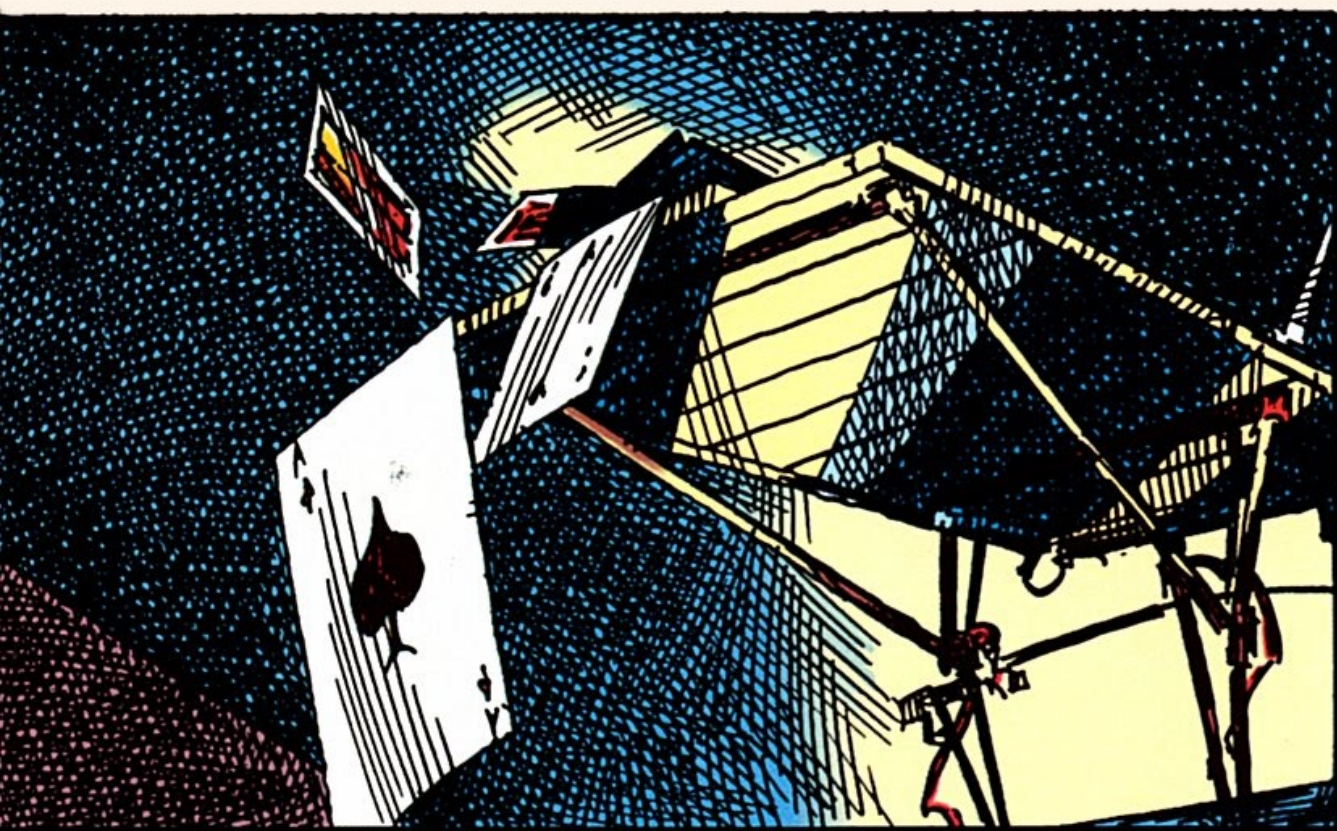


The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon.

Not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.





In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

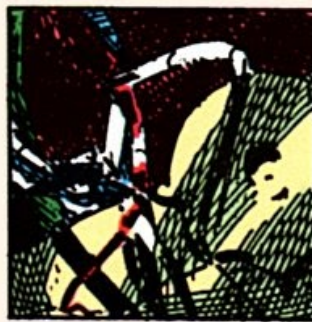
Two thirty-five.

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played. But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls.

Four-thirty.

The nursery walls glowed.



Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets,

and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue waved among the sharp aroma of animal spoor! Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes.

It was the children's hour.





Five o'clock.

The bath filled with clear
hot water.

Six, seven, eight o'clock.

In the study a *click*. In
the metal stand opposite
the hearth where a fire
now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half
an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

Nine-five.

A voice spoke from the study ceiling:

"Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like
this evening?"

The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no
preference, I shall select a poem at random."
Quiet music rose to back the voice.

"Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite . . .



*"There will come soft
rains and the smell of
the ground,*

*And swallows cir-
cling with their shim-
mering sound;*

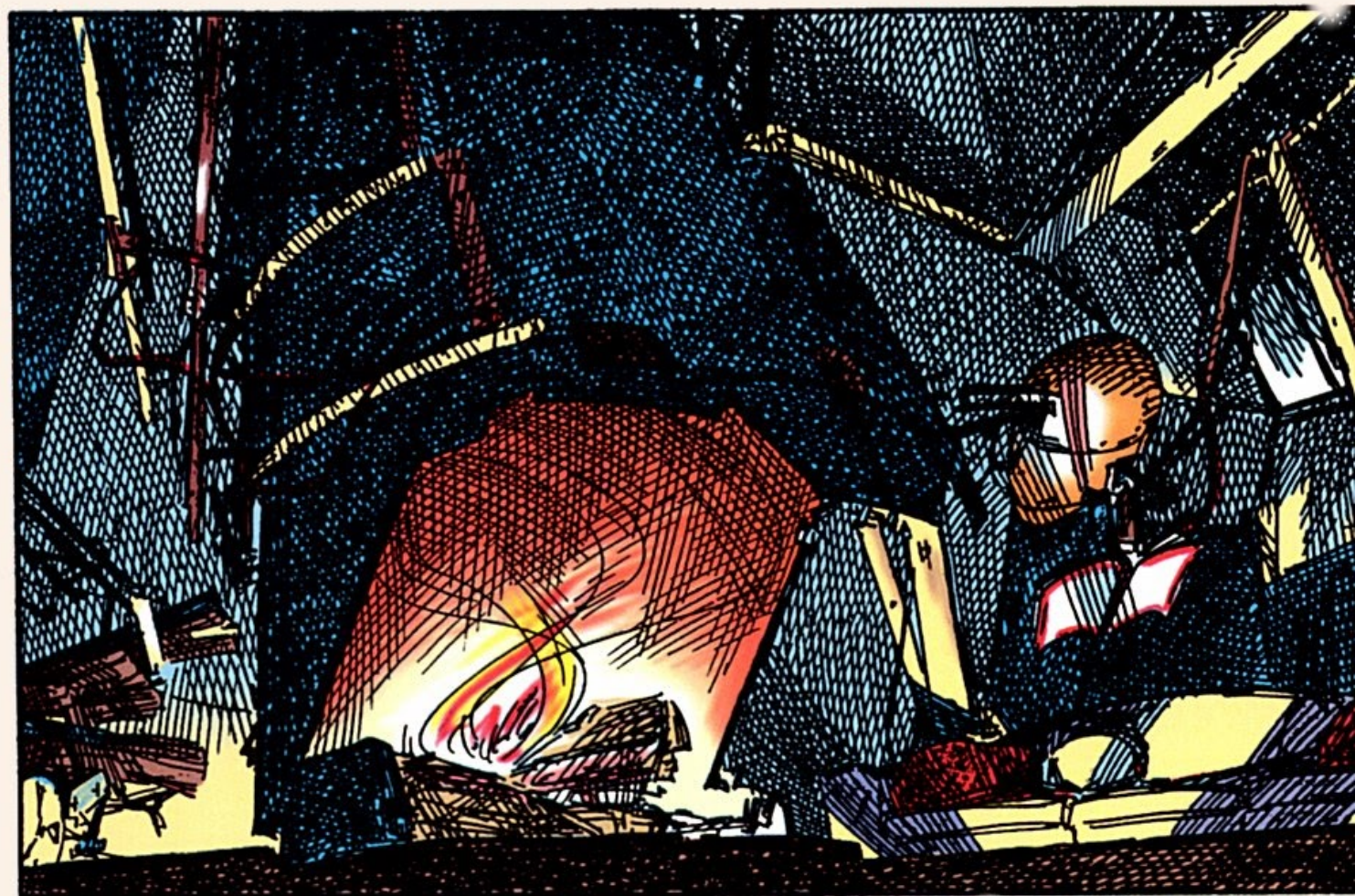
And frogs in the pools singing at night,

And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

*Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;*

*And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.*

*Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone."*





The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray.

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.



The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs.

It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes! And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.



And the voices wailed
Fire, fire, run, run, like
a tragic nursery rhyme,
a dozen voices, high,
low, like children dying
in a forest, alone,
alone. And the voices
fading as the wires
popped their sheathings
like hot chestnuts.

One, two, three, four, five voices died.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the

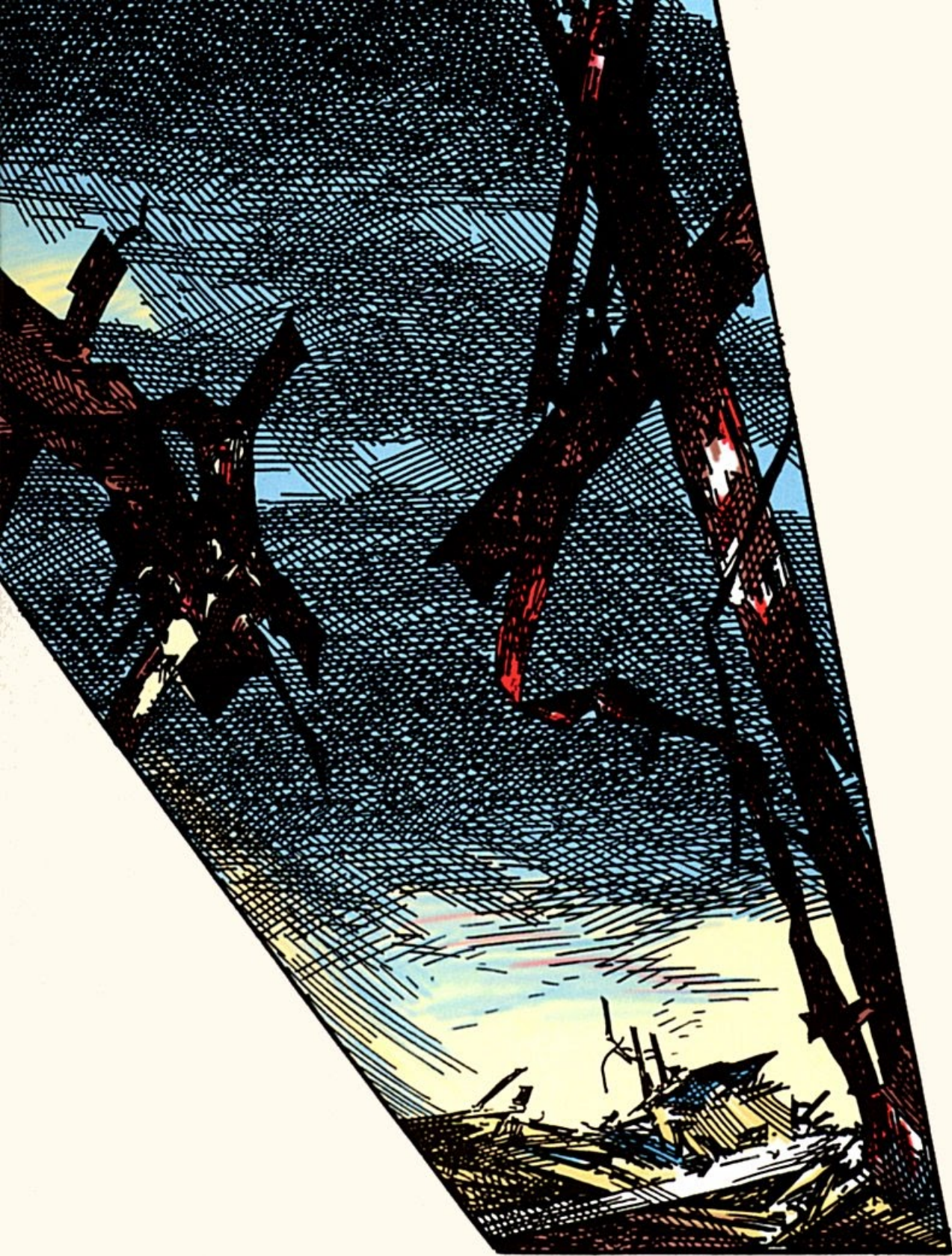


time, playing music,
cutting the lawn by
remote-control mower,
or setting an umbrella
frantically out and in
the slamming and
opening front door, a
thousand things hap-
pening, like a clock
shop when each clock

strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.





The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam: "August 5 2026."

A SPECIAL E.C. COMICS RAY BRADBURY CLASSIC

Illustrated By Wally Wood
Newly Colored By Paul Rivoche

By happy, or unhappy, coincidence I had that week seen a photograph taken in Hiroshima not long after the A-Bomb blast that killed tens of thousands. On the side of a house I saw burned-away areas which left, in silhouette, unburned paint where the shapes of people had stood. Their images, like photographs, had been etched on the side of the house. This photograph was so terrible that when I heard the Teasdale poem, the two elements fused and within three hours I wrote and finished THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS. It honors not only the poet but the shapes of vanished people, fixed in paint on that house-siding so many years ago.

RAY B.

there will come soft rains...

THE SUN CAME OUT FROM BEHIND THE RAIN. THE HOUSE STOOD ALONE IN A CITY OF RUBBLE AND ASHES. THIS WAS THE ONE HOUSE LEFT STANDING! AT NIGHT, THE RUINED CITY GAVE OFF A RADIOACTIVE GLOW WHICH COULD BE SEEN FOR MILES. THE ENTIRE WEST FACE OF THE HOUSE WAS BLACK, SAVE FOR FIVE PLACES. HERE, THE WHITE SILHOUETTE OF A MAN MOWED A LAWN. THERE, AS IN A PHOTOGRAPH, A WOMAN BENT TO PICK FLOWERS. STILL FARTHER OVER, THEIR IMAGES OUTLINED IN ONE TITANIC INSTANT, A SMALL BOY, HANDS FLUNG INTO THE AIR... HIGHER UP, THE IMAGE OF A THROWN BALL... AND OPPOSITE HIM, A GIRL, HANDS RAISED TO CATCH THE BALL WHICH NEVER CAME DOWN...



THE FIVE SPOTS OF PAINT... THE MAN, THE WOMAN, THE CHILDREN, THE BALL REMAINED! THE REST WAS A CHARCOAL LAYER...

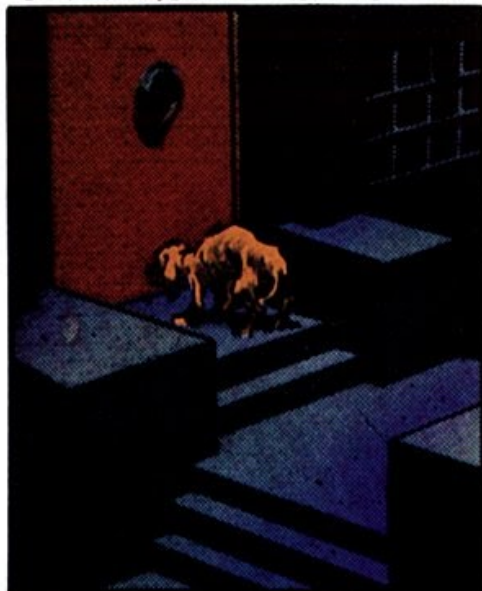
THE MORNING HOUSE LAY EMPTY. IN THE LIVING ROOM, THE VOICE-CLOCK SANG, REPEATING AND REPEATING ITS SOUNDS INTO THE EMPTINESS...



IN THE KITCHEN, THE BREAKFAST STOVE GAVE A HISSING SIGH AND EJECTED FROM ITS WARM INTERIOR EIGHT PIECES OF PERFECTLY BROWNED TOAST, EIGHT EGGS SUNNYSIDE UP, SIXTEEN SLICES OF BACON, TWO COFFEES, AND TWO COOL GLASSES OF MILK...



TWELVE NOON. A DOG WHINED, SHIVERING, ON THE FRONT PORCH...



THE FRONT DOOR RECOGNIZED THE DOG'S VOICE AND OPENED. THE DOG, ONCE HUGE AND FLESHY, BUT NOW GONE TO BONE AND COVERED WITH SORES, MOVED INSIDE, TRACKING MUD...



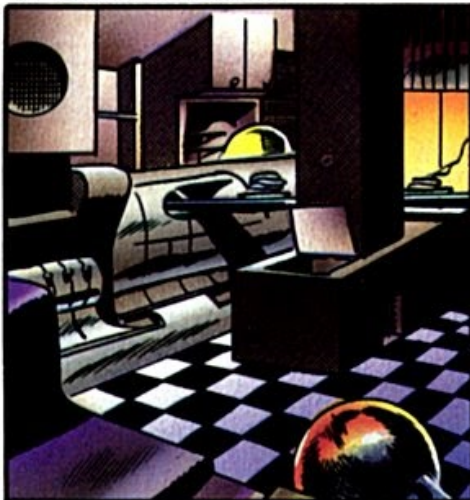
BEHIND IT, ANGRY MICE WHIRLED... ANGRY AT HAVING TO PICK UP MUD... ANGRY AT INCONVENIENCE. FOR NOT A LEAF FRAGMENT BLEW UNDER THE DOOR BUT WHAT THE WALL PANELS FLIPPED OPEN AND THE SCRAP RATS FLASHED SWIFTLY OUT...



THE DOG RAN AROUND, HYSTERICALLY YELPING TO EACH DOOR, AT LAST REALIZING, AS THE HOUSE REALIZED, THAT ONLY SILENCE WAS HERE! IT SNIFFED THE AIR AND SCRATCHED AT THE KITCHEN DOOR...

BEHIND THE DOOR, THE STOVE WAS MAKING LUNCH... PANCAKES WHICH FILLED THE HOUSE WITH A RICH BAKING ODOR AND THE SCENT OF MAPLE SYRUP...

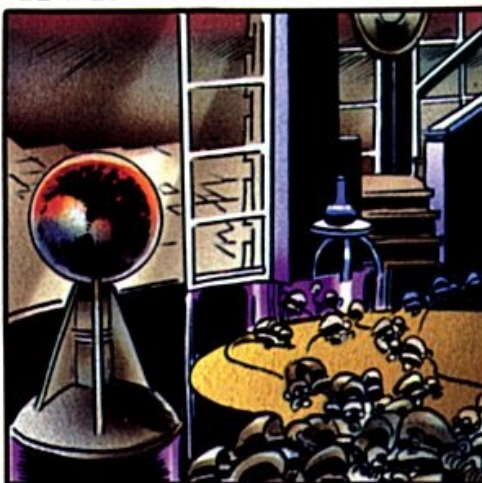
THE DOG FROTHED AT THE MOUTH, LYING AT THE DOOR, SNIFFING, ITS EYES TURNED TO FIRE...



IT RAN WILDLY IN CIRCLES, BITING ITS TAIL, SPUN IN A FRENZY...

... AND DIED! IT LAY IN THE HALLWAY FOR AN HOUR...

DELICATELY SENSING DECAY AT LAST, THE REGIMENTS OF MICE HUMMED OUT AS SOFTLY AS BLOWN LEAVES IN AN ELECTRICAL WIND...



TWO-FIFTEEN. THE DOG WAS GONE! 3

SOMEWHERE IN THE WALLS, RELAYS CLICKED... MEMORY TAPES GLIDED UNDER ELECTRIC EYES...

TODAY IS AUGUST 4, 2026! TODAY IS MR. FEATHERSTONE'S BIRTHDAY! TODAY IS THE ANNIVERSARY OF TILITA'S MARRIAGE! INSURANCE IS PAYABLE... AS ARE THE WATER, GAS, AND LIGHT BILLS...



OUTSIDE, THE GARAGE CHIMED AND LIFTED ITS DOORS TO REVEAL THE WAITING CAR...



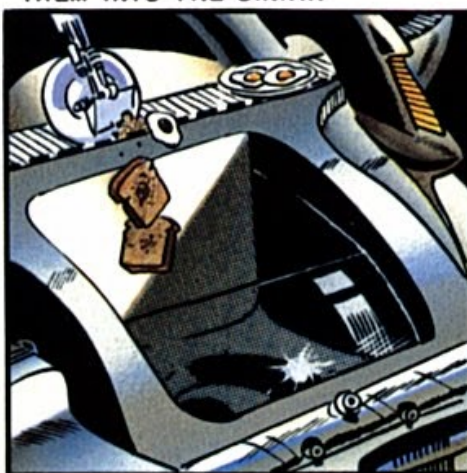
OUT OF WARRENS IN THE WALL, TINY ROBOT MICE-LIKE THINGS DARTED. THE ROOMS WERE ACRAWL WITH THE SMALL CLEANING ANIMALS, ALL RUBBER AND METAL...



THE VOICE CLOCK SOUNDED AGAIN. EIGHT-ONE! TICK-TOCK! EIGHT-ONE O'CLOCK! OFF TO SCHOOL! OFF TO WORK! RUN! RUN! EIGHT-ONE...



AFTER A LONG WAIT, THE DOOR SWUNG DOWN AGAIN. AT EIGHT-THIRTY, THE EGGS WERE SHRIVELED AND THE TOAST WAS LIKE STONE. AN ALUMINUM WEDGE SCRAPPED THEM INTO THE SINK...



THEY THUDDED AGAINST CHAIRS, WHIRLING THEIR MUSTACHED RUNNERS, KNEADING THE RUG NAP, SUCKING GENTLY AT HIDDEN DUST. THEN, LIKE MYSTERIOUS INVADERS, THEY POPPED BACK INTO THEIR NOOKS. THEIR PINK ELECTRIC-EYES FADED. THE HOUSE WAS CLEAN...



BUT NO DOORS SLAMMED. NO CARPETS TOOK THE SOFT TREAD OF RUBBER HEELS. IT WAS RAINING AGAIN OUTSIDE. THE WEATHER-BOX ON THE FRONT DOOR SANG QUIETLY...



... WHERE HOT WATER WHIRLED THEM DOWN A METAL THROAT WHICH DIGESTED AND FLUSHED THEM AWAY TO THE DISTANT SEA. THE DIRTY DISHES WERE DROPPED INTO A HOT WASHER AND EMERGED TWINKLING DRY...



TEN-FIFTEEN. THE GARDEN SPRINKLERS CAME UP IN GOLDEN FOUNTS. THE WATER PELTED WINDOWPANES, RUNNING DOWN THE CHARRED WEST SIDE WHERE THE HOUSE HAD BEEN BURNED EVENLY FREE OF ITS WHITE PAINT...



AT TEN O'CLOCK THE HOUSE
BEGAN TO DIE! THE WIND BLEW. A
FALLING BOUGH CRASHED THROUGH
THE KITCHEN WINDOW...



CLEANING SOLVENT, BOTTLED,
SHATTERED OVER THE STOVE!



THE ROOM WAS ABLAZE IN AN
INSTANT...



THE HOUSE LIGHTS FLASHED ON.
WATER PUMPS SHOT FROM THE
CEILINGS...



BUT THE SOLVENT SPREAD ON
THE LINOLEUM, LICKING, EATING,
UNDER THE KITCHEN DOOR,
WHILE THE VOICES TOOK UP
THE CHORUS...



THE HOUSE TRIED TO SAVE
ITSELF. DOORS SPRANG TIGHTLY
SHUT, BUT THE WINDOWS WERE
BROKEN BY THE HEAT, AND THE
WIND BLEW, SUCKING UPON THE
FIRE...



THE HOUSE GAVE GROUND AS THE FIRE IN TEN
BILLION ANGRY SPARKS MOVED WITH FLAMING
EASE FROM ROOM TO ROOM THROUGH THE HOUSE...



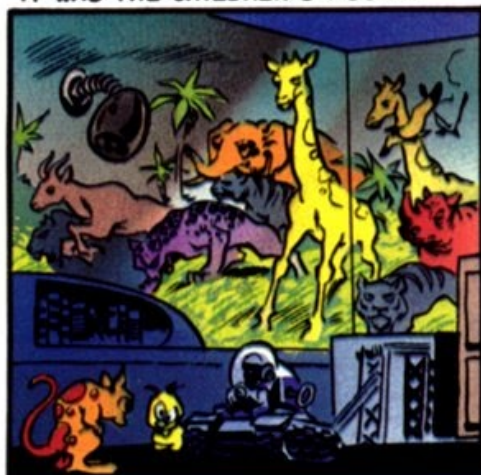
...WHILE SCURRYING WATER RATS SQUEAKED FROM
THE WALLS, PISTOLED THEIR WATER, AND RAN FOR
MORE. THE WALL SPRAYS LET DOWN SHOWERS OF
MECHANICAL RAIN...



IN THE CELLAR, THE INCINERATOR
GLOWED SUDDENLY AND A WHIRL
OF SPARKS LEAPED UP THE
CHIMNEY...



FOUR-THIRTY. THE NURSERY WALLS
GLOWED! ANIMALS TOOK SHAPE...
YELLOW GIRAFFES, BLUE LIONS,
PINK ANTELOPES, LILAC PANTHERS...
CAVORTING IN CRYSTAL SUBSTANCE!
IT WAS THE CHILDREN'S HOUR...



NINE O'CLOCK. HIDDEN CIRCUITS
WARMED THE BEDS, FOR NIGHTS
WERE COOL HERE...



TWO THIRTY-FIVE. BRIDGE TABLES
SPROUTED FROM PATIO WALLS .
PLAYING CARDS FLUTTERED ONTO
PADS IN A SHOWER OF PIPS .
MARTINIS AND EGG SALAD SAND-
WICHES MANIFESTED ON AN
OAKEN SERVER. MUSIC PLAYED...



FIVE O'CLOCK. THE BATH FILLED
WITH CLEAR HOT WATER...



THE FIRE BURNED ON THE STONE
HEARTH AND THE CIGAR FELL
AWAY INTO A MOUND OF QUIET
ASH ON ITS TRAY...



FOUR-O'CLOCK. THE TABLES FOLDED
LIKE GREAT BUTTERFLIES BACK
THROUGH PANEL WALLS...



SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT O'CLOCK. DINNER.
IN THE STUDY... A CLICK. A CIGAR
POPPED UP IN THE METAL STAND
OPPOSITE THE HEARTH... HALF AN
INCH OF GREY ASH ON IT, SMOKING,
WAITING...



THE EMPTY CHAIRS FACED EACH
OTHER BETWEEN THE SILENT WALLS.
AND THE MUSIC PLAYED...



BUT IT WAS TOO LATE! SOMEWHERE, SIGHING, A PUMP SHRUGGED TO A STOP. THE QUENCHING RAINS CEASED. THE RESERVE WATER SUPPLY WHICH HAD FILLED BATHS AND WASHED DISHES FOR MANY QUIET DAYS, WAS GONE! THE FIRE CRACKLED ON...



IT FED UPON PICASSOS AND MATISSES IN THE HALLS, LIKE DELICACIES, BAKING OFF THE OILY FLESH, TENDERLY CRISPING THE CANVASES INTO BLACK SHAVINGS...



NOW THE FIRE LAY IN BEDS, STOOD IN WINDOWS, CHANGING THE COLOR OF THE DRAPES...



AND THEN REINFORCEMENTS! FROM ATTIC TRAP-DOORS, BLIND ROBOT FACES PEERED DOWN WITH FAUCET-MOUTHS GUSHING GREEN CHEMICAL...



THE FIRE BACKED OFF, AS EVEN AN ELEPHANT MUST AT THE SIGHT OF A DEAD SNAKE. NOW THERE WERE TWENTY SNAKES WHIPPING OVER THE FLOOR, KILLING THE FIRE WITH A CLEAR COLD VENOM OF GREEN FROTH...



BUT THE FIRE WAS CLEVER! IT HAD SENT FLAMES OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, UP THROUGH THE ATTIC TO THE PUMPS THERE! AN EXPLOSION...



THE ATTIC BRAIN WHICH DIRECTED THE PUMPS WAS SHATTERED INTO BRONZE SHRAPNEL ON THE BEAMS. THE FIRE RUSHED BACK INTO EVERY CLOSET AND FELT OF THE CLOTHES HUNG THERE...



THE HOUSE SHUDDERED, OAK BONE ON BONE, ITS BARED SKELETON CRINGING FROM THE HEAT, ITS WIRES, ITS NERVES REVEALED AS IF A SURGEON HAD TORN THE SKIN OFF TO LET RED VEINS AND CAPILLARIES QUIVER IN THE SCALDING AIR. HEAT SNAPPED MIRRORS. THE VOICES WAILED...



...LIKE A TRAGIC NURSERY RHYME. A DOZEN VOICES, HIGH, LOW, LIKE CHILDREN DYING IN A FOREST, ALONE, ALONE. AND THE VOICES FADED AS THE WIRES POPPED THEIR SHEATHINGS. IN THE NURSERY, THE BLUE LIONS ROARED, PURPLE GIRAFFES BOUNDED OFF, PANTHERS RAN IN CIRCLES, CHANGING COLOR...



VOICES DIED. IN THE LAST INSTANT UNDER THE FIRE AVALANCHE, OTHER CHORUSES, OBLIVIOUS, COULD BE HEARD ANNOUNCING THE TIME, PLAYING MUSIC, REMINDING THE HOT FLAMES OF DUE BILLS. DOORS OPENED AND SLAMMED. A FEW LAST CLEANING MICE DARTED BRAVELY OUT TO CARRY AWAY THE HORRID ASHES...

AND IN THE KITCHEN, AN INSTANT BEFORE THE RAIN OF FIRE AND TIMBER, THE STOVE COULD BE SEEN MAKING BREAKFAST AT A PSYCHOPATHIC RATE...TEN DOZEN EGGS, SIX LOAVES OF TOAST, TWENTY DOZEN BACON STRIPS, WHICH, EATEN BY FIRE STARTED THE STOVE WORKING AGAIN, HYSTERICALLY HISSING...



THE CRASH! THE ATTIC SMASHED INTO THE KITCHEN... THE KITCHEN INTO THE CELLAR... CELLAR INTO SUB-CELLAR. DEEP-FREEZE, ARMCHAIR, FILM TAPES, CIRCUITS, BEDS, ALL LIKE SKELETONS THROWN IN A CLUTTERED MOUND DEEP UNDER...



THEN, SMOKE...AND SILENCE!



DAWN SHOWED FAINTLY IN THE EAST. AMONG THE RUINS, ONE WALL STOOD ALONE. WITHIN THE WALL, A LAST VOICE SAID, OVER AND OVER, AGAIN AND AGAIN...

TODAY IS AUGUST 5, 2026!
TODAY IS AUGUST 5, 2026!
TODAY IS...



STEVE LEIALOHA has worked in the comic book industry for the past twenty years on a diverse number of titles, including "Star Wars," "X-Men," "Batman," "Warlock" and "Tryp to the Acid Dog." He has made occasional storyboarding forays into the film and television business and is currently working on the comic book adaptation of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

BRUCE JENSEN has illustrated the covers for "The Missing Matter," "Alien Tongue," "Modular Man" and "Red Genesis" for Bantam Books; "The Ultimate Dracula," "The Ultimate Frankenstein" and "The Ultimate Werewolf" for Dell; and "Isaac Asimov's Robots in Time" series for Avon Books. In addition, Jensen illustrated the first volume of the graphic adaptation of William Gibson's "Neuromancer" for Marvel/Epic.

CHUCK ROBLIN is the creator of "Tex Benson," a cold-war aviation story taking place in the distant future, which ran as a syndicated daily and Sunday strip in European newspapers

for over a decade. It was published as a comic book in the States in 3-D by The 3-D Zone and is now called "Zori Stories." Roblin is a huge Ray Bradbury fan and resides in Southern California.

STEVE FASTNER is an airbrush artist based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has illustrated covers for several paperback series, including "My Teacher is an Alien," "Bill the Galactic Hero," and "The 5th Grade Monsters," and is currently collaborating with cartoonist Rich Larson on cover art for "Judge Dredd" comics albums.

TIM TRUMAN has worked as a writer, illustrator, editor and publisher. He has scripted and illustrated popular adventure comics such as "Scout," "The Spider," "Grimjack" and "Hawkworld," and is a regular contributor to the "Grateful Dead Comix." He lives and works in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

LEBBEUS WOODS is an architect, a teacher and a visionary, equally at ease with Newtonian physics and science fiction. He

has lived in New York City since 1976, where he concentrates on architectural theory, experimental projects and teaching.

WALLY WOOD joined the staff of E.C. Comics in 1950, and quickly became one of its premier artists. Wood contributed to the E.C. science fiction titles, doing some of the very first graphic adaptations of Bradbury's short stories. He also worked on the much lauded "war" titles, *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*. And, in 1952, Wood became a major contributor to *MAD*, doing flawless parodies of established comic strips and books. He is widely acknowledged as one of the most talented artists ever to work in the comic field.

LOVERN KINDZIERSKI is best known in comics for his color art for DC Comics, Marvel Comics, and others. He has a project in development for Dark Horse Publishing to be drawn by John Bolton. He is currently the Creative Director of Digital Chameleon in Manitoba.

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